

MOLLUSCAN FORUM 2009

CONFERENCE REPORT

Last year I wrote a report from the Molluscan Forum (2008), I suspect I wrote one also in 2007, and I can't even remember how many reports from how many Polish Malacological Seminars I produced. I find it increasingly difficult to vary the reports instead of writing them all according to the same scheme, but I'll try to do my best.

Molluscan Forum is designed for young malacologists; it is aimed at bringing them together, to present and discuss their results, start scientific friendships and co-operations, and... to listen to some good advice from their old aunts and uncles. The aunts and uncles (old malacologists) are welcome or even encouraged to participate, but without any presentations. Instead, they are allowed to ask difficult questions during the discussion and drink wine after the sessions. The Forum also provides them with an opportunity to meet and discuss co-authored papers, swap materials etc. The Forum is organised by The Malacological Society of London and The Natural History Museum, London. The 2009 Forum was the 12th; as a result some of the people who had featured as young malacologists early on, were now present as other people's supervisors (MICHAL HORSÁK with his horde of students is a good example).

This year's Forum was held on the 12th of November, in the Dorothea Bate Room, Palaeontology building, Natural History Museum. The Organising Committee included Prof. MARK DAVIES (University of Sunderland), MARTINE CLAREMONT (PhD student, Imperial College London & Natural History Museum) and CLAIRE STANDLEY (PhD student, University of Nottingham & Natural History Museum). Mind you, last year the Organisers were one professor and two doctors, now the students are beginning to take over! Bless MARK and the girls, everybody knows what an effort it requires to organise even a small and short conference. The 27 active participants – young partici-

pants, with presentations, besides there were many old participants who were only active asking nasty questions – which was more than last year, came from the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Germany, Japan, Belgium, Italy, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Portugal, France, Poland – quite a range for a meeting with only 27 people.

The programme and the book of abstracts included 14 oral presentations and 13 posters. Because the participants were young, from various countries, and numerous enough to constitute a statistically representative sample, I tried to categorise the presentations from this and the previous Forum, like I do for the reports from the Polish Malacological Seminars (with a quite different age structure), and compare the topical structure of the three meetings to see if malacology will change much in the next few years. The comparison is presented in the Table.

Terrestrial malacology is going downhill again, at least in terms of popularity: the land:water ratio was 0.42:1 at the 2009 Forum, 0.92:1 at the 2008 Forum and 0.94:1 at the 2009 Seminar; the same is true of the snail:bivalve ratio which was 1.33:1 at the 2009 Forum, 2.43:1 at the 2008 Forum (2.35:1 at the 2009 Seminar). However, in the Table the percentages in the three columns are not much different. Most differences seem to be accidental, considering the small number of the Forum presentations (23 in 2008 and 27 in 2009) and the disproportionately greater number of the Seminar presentations for 2006–2009 (240). The proportion of life history papers used to be significantly greater during the Seminars, but not any more, while the proportion of systematic/phylogenetic presentations is still much smaller. The young people are coming back to systematics! Another identifiable trend is that most conservation presentations are concerned with the so called invasive species (partly because it is an interesting problem, partly – no doubt – because there is money to study it).

No.	Discipline	Percentage of papers/posters		
		Molluscan Forum 2008	Molluscan Forum 2009	Seminars 2006–2009
1	Ecology	24%	18.5%	27.9%
2	Life histories	4%	11.1%	12.9%
3	Conservation	12%	18.5%	7.9%
4	Fossil molluscs	0%	7.5%	7.9%
5	Applied malacology	12%	0%	6.3%
6	Parasitology	0%	0%	6.7%
7	Faunistics	0%	3.7%	5.4%
8	Methodology	16%	11.1%	2.9%
9	Physiology	0%	0%	1.7%
10	Structure (histology, cytology, shell)	4%	0%	2.9%
11	Variation	0%	0%	2.5%
12	Systematics/phylogeny	16%	18.5%	4.6%
13	Molecular genetics	12%	11.1%	3.3%
14	Collections	0%	0%	1.7%
15	Others (general, behaviour, archaeology)	0%	0%	5.4%

Some countries were represented by rather many people, thus offering a chance to check if particular countries preferred some particular branches of malacology. Out of the five Czech presentations, four were concerned with ecology/conservation (only one with methods, but ecology-related); on the other hand among the 14 British/Irish/Scottish presentations (including foreign authors doing their PhD at UK universities), 4 were conservational, 3 about systematics/phylogeny, 3 about various aspects of life histories, 2 ecological, 1 palaeontological and 1 about methods. Poland was represented by two active participants: RAFAŁ LASOTA (talk) and KATARZYNA SKOWROŃSKA (poster). I especially liked three lectures: by REGINA LOPES DA CUNHA, Portugal (recipient of the recent award of the Malacological Society of London), DAGMAR RIHOVA (Fig. 1), The Czech Re-

public and ALEXANDRA ZIERITZ, Cambridge, UK (but originally from Denmark). All the posters were beautiful, it is a shame I can't include all of them here (Fig. 2). All in all, the kids are developing like greased lightning. Beware, we old hags and geezers, before we wink an eye we'll be in early retirement, replaced by the new, and much more skillful generation.

An interesting piece of pseudostatistics is the proportion of multi-author versus single-author papers. During the 2009 Forum it was almost equal (14 single-author presentations and 13 with two to four authors; for comparison, at the 2009 Seminar there were exactly 50% multi-author presentations); it is apparently becoming more and more popular to form co-operatives. Another such piece of pseudostatistics is the sex ratio (among the actual presenters, not all the numerous authors): the girls to boys ratio was 15:12

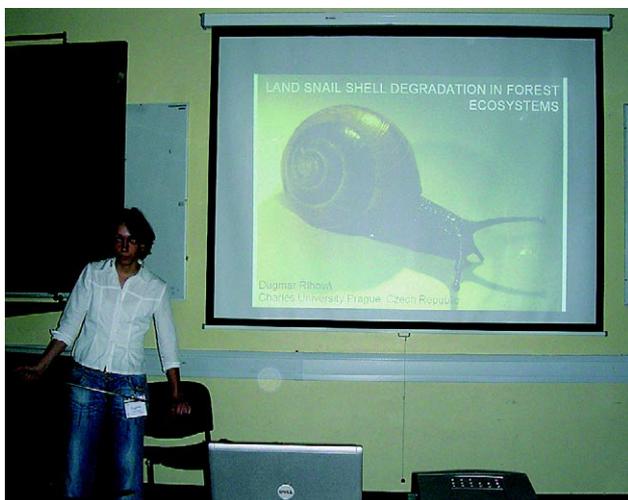


Fig. 1. DAGMAR RIHOVA speaking. Photo B. M. POKRYSZKO

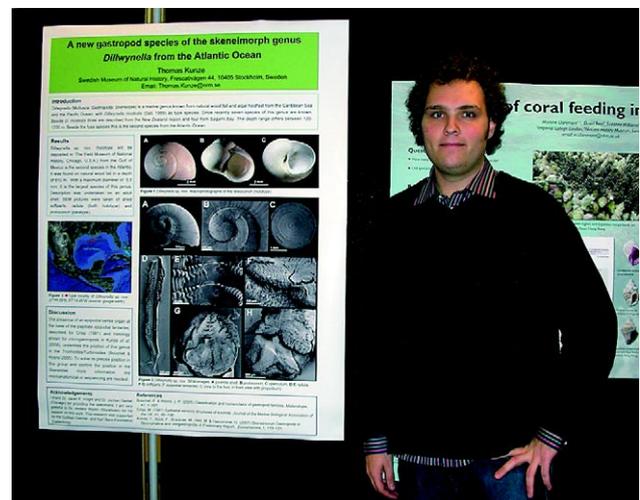


Fig. 2. THOMAS KUNZE and his poster. Photo B. M. POKRYSZKO



(and 41 girls versus 19 boys for the 2009 Seminar); is malacology getting dominated by girls, are girls less reluctant to present their results, or is it all statistically insignificant?

The sessions were followed by a wine reception (after all, there has to be some bait to lure the old malacologists to come to the Forum), with various excellent cheeses (found and ordered by two of the organisers, MARTINE and CLAIRE), and then a beer evening in our usual and rather crowded pub, Hoop & Toy. Imagine, some of those otherwise very bright kids didn't even know where the Hoop & Toy was!

The Malacological Society of London and The Natural History Museum, London really deserve a good round of applause! It is a great initiative which

shows what a society or an institution can do to really promote the development of malacology. The Forum meetings are usually held in November. Look at the Malacological Society's website for information about the next meeting. Go there, make scientific friends while you are young, present and discuss your results and meet potential co-authors, and hope that when you are old and grey you will be given wine and cheese at least, even if you fail to ask an intelligent question...

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