

CONFERENCE REPORTS: INVASIVE MOLLUSCS CONFERENCE, CAMBRIDGE & THE WORLD CONGRESS OF MALACOLOGY, ANTWERP

The 23rd Polish Malacological Seminar, April 24th–27th 2007, Serpelice (see *Folia Malacologica* 15: 95–119, 2007) was not the only malacological event in 2007. Not even the biggest and certainly not the most

international. There were at least two more: one small one before our Seminar, in April, and one huge one in July (maybe there were more but I know about these two only).

INVASIVE MOLLUSCS CONFERENCE, CAMBRIDGE

The Invasive Molluscs Conference in Cambridge, organised by The London Malacological Society (mainly DAVID ALDRIDGE from Cambridge; thanks David!), was short – only April 2nd. Due to this, and to the fact that the abstracts were just computer outprints, not a book, the conference was cheap. The participants were not very many; maybe people found the term “invasive” a bit scary and preferred to stay away. One may not completely accept the term (I don't), if only because of the variety of horrible things it suggests, such as parasites, or all the various orifices they might use to invade, but the phenomenon, because it is so common nowadays, IS scary. Every country has invasive molluscs, almost everywhere they have recently started spreading to natural habitats and/or to larger areas, every country has recently acquired a new invasive mollusc or two. All because of import, export, European Union, some other unions; some invaders appear for no identifiable reason. Some of them do not do any harm, or at least no harm that we could see, they just are. Some march into the countryside to devour our crops, some jump into our waters and tamper with our hydrotechnical devices. Some compete with native species (successfully), or attempt to sell them new parasites. There is thus a pest control aspect and a nature conservation aspect. However, when more than one scientist(s) get together (it is impossible for one scientist to get together, largely for technical reasons) they happily abandon all the practical sides of the matter and indulge in theoretical discussions. This is exactly what hap-

pened during the Conference. The total number of presentations was 17 (13 lectures, 4 posters); among these 15 dealt decently either directly with various aspects of control of or with damage caused by invasive species, while two more or less argued to the effect that most invasive species were not invasive (whatever that means) at all, or that recolonisation of deglaciated areas in post-Pleistocene was also an “invasive” behaviour. Wicked demagogues! No no, I'm naming no names here.

Though the title of the Conference did not suggest its international character (but it did not suggest a national character either), it was pretty international. Participants were few, about twenty I should think, but they came from 10 countries: England, France, India, Ireland, Jordan, Poland, Portugal, Spain, The Czech Republic, The Netherlands. Ten presentations were about bivalves (and 50% of them about *Dreissena polymorpha*), five about gastropods, two about both; four were terrestrial, 12 aquatic and one was amphibious.

Moral: those of us who are in the habit of producing check-lists that include also introduced species should start thinking of updating their checklists soon and maybe then regularly in the future. On the other hand, during the post-Pleistocene colonisation nobody bothered to update their checklists...

The conference was short, officially one day, so some participants came only for the day. They should have come earlier or stayed longer because Cambridge is beautiful, and the weather was, too.

WORLD CONGRESS OF MALACOLOGY, ANTWERP

The World Congress of Malacology in Antwerp, Belgium was quite a different kind of event and, first of all, huuuuuge! For those of you who don't remember the olden times: first there were congresses of the *Unitas Malacologica* which was originally the European Malacological Union. There were 12 such congresses, all of them in Europe, in one city or another (for example, Amsterdam, Milan, Perpignan, Budapest, Edinburgh, Tübingen, Siena, Vigo). They were held every three years. Then, in 1998 it was decided that, to sort of make the title reflect the contents, they should be called World Congresses of Malacology, held also every three years, but regrettably nobody bothered to number them. I have counted and if I'm right, the last congress, had the count been kept, would have been the 16th Congress. Which is quite a long tradition. Though the Congress name changed, the way of doing it didn't and as always the main organiser was the *Unitas* President. It is said that president is elected for the sole purpose of organising the next congress, then he does and then he's never re-elected because once is enough. Also, some say that afterwards he/she is not much use. This time it was the Organisers-in-Chief: THIERRY BACKELJAU – President (Natural History Museum in Brussels and University of Antwerp) (Fig. 1), JACKIE VAN GOETHEM and KURT JORDAENS, who organised everything absolutely perfectly. Thanks and congratulations, we really do hope you'll have lots of time now, to do malacology and not organising.

The timing of the 2007 Congress was a bit inconvenient, but I think there were some important reasons for it. It was July 15th–20th, so that many people had to rush to Antwerp in the middle of their field work, holidays etc. Nevertheless attendance was impressive! 432 people registered for the Congress, 421 attended and they represented 45 countries (all continents except Antarctica). To give you some statistics: the US participants were the most numerous (75), followed by the Germans (60) and Spaniards (37). The youngest participant was 18, the oldest asked me not to reveal his age. Among the 421 participants there were 146 students, 204 members of *Unitas Malacologica* and 130 ladies (mind you, these figures do not have to add up to the total of 421, since you can be a student, a UM member and a lady, all in one).

Even the titles of the so called major symposia, without listing all the lecture titles, would give you a good picture of the variety: Sexual Selection in Molluscs; Inventorying the Molluscan fauna of the World: Frontiers and Perspectives; Micromolluscs: Methodological Challenges, Exciting Results; Molluscs as Models in Evolutionary Biology: from Local Speciation to Global Radiation; Molluscs in Ecotoxicological Research; Molluscs and Pest Control; Molluscan

Models: Advancing our Understanding of the Eye; Zoogeography of the Non-Marine Molluscs of the Eastern Mediterranean; Biodiversity at Crossroads: Freshwater Bivalves: from Mass Extinction to Global Invasion; Neogastropod Origins, Phylogeny, Evolutionary Pathways and Mechanisms; Heart and Circulation in Molluscs; Quaternary Malacology. If my guess is right, the titles of major symposia are usually dictated by the topics of the submitted presentations, and not the other way around, and thus these titles give you an idea what most malacologists are after, nowadays. The Abstract Book contains 252 A4 pages of abstracts, single-spaced!

Such a big meeting and so many presentations necessitated running from session to session [=from room to room] for those who wanted to listen to one lecture in one room, and then – say – two lectures in another (most of us). Fortunately, everything happened on time which was very nearly a miracle. The poster session was very good, not only scientifically, but also almost every single poster was very nice to look at. Maybe it was not a very good idea to serve so much good food and so many good drinks during the session. I know it was to prevent us from running away to the restaurants and pubs to feed and drink; instead, the abundance of things to consume prevented the voracious and the ever-thirsty from really looking at the display. Various committees judged the student presentations (both lectures and posters) and awarded prizes. Tough job, because most students were very good. The prize winners will certainly be mentioned in many newsletters and they do not need to be listed here. Instead I will tell you about the presentations I liked most. One was a lecture by CHRISTOPH ALLGAIER (University of Tübingen), about an enid which used active camouflage, covering its shell with radula-chewed lichen lumps. This one actually got a prize. Another was a lecture by a young Czech girl NICOLE CERNOHORSKY, about spring fen mollusc communities. The third one was a poster by another Czech student, MAGDA HRABÁKOVÁ, about the genus *Trochulus* [= *Trichia*] (Fig. 2). Graphically, the most beautiful presentation was the one by IRA RICHLING (Kiel) about helicid snails.

The congress excursions went to various places: Brugge, Saefthinge (salt marshes) and Castle of Bouillon/Monastery of Orval; one excursion was a biking tour. We went to Brugge (Fig. 3), as for some it was maybe the only opportunity to see this really beautiful city. We spent the whole day there and it seemed too short; we were taken on a guided tour, then released to do our own sightseeing and shopping – many nice things to shop for, I found a fabulous snail, carved in wood and hand-painted, maybe not typically Belgian but after all it was a malacological congress. The day



Fig. 1. Presidential address during the banquet. Photo B. M. POKRYSZKO



Fig. 2. MAGDA HRABÁKOVÁ and her poster. Photo B. M. POKRYSZKO



Fig. 3. Malacologists sightseeing in Brugge. Photo B. M. POKRYSZKO

ended with a dinner at an old brewery (great view from the roof!), with various Belgian cheeses and beers.

The Congress Dinner was also good, if we had lived in Belgium we would have turned into very fat malacologists very soon (how come the Organisers-in-Chief: THIERRY BACKELJAU, JACKIE VAN GOETHEM or KURT JORDAENS, are not overweight? Adapted or not at-

tracted by the pleasures of the Belgian cuisine any more?)

The next president is SOMSAK PANCHANG, from Thailand, and the 2010 congress will be in Thailand.

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