

A TALE OF THREE MEETINGS

THREE CONFERENCE REPORTS

The 22nd Polish Malacological Seminar took place in April 2006, the next will in all likelihood be in April 2007 (see also *Folia Malacologica* 14(2)). The next Malacological Congress is also 2007. In the meantime you might think there is nowhere to go. Not so! We only think them the most important, one because it's Polish, the other because it's the biggest. Fortunately, these two kinds of meetings are not the only malacological events. Actually, in 2006 there were at least three good meetings in Europe, two with some tradition but rather little known, and one that took place for the first time ever but perhaps will become, for European malacologists, a regular destination of their annual, or biennial, migrations. Chronologically, these were: the Czech and Slovak Malacodays, The First Baltic Symposium on Malacology and Molluscan Forum 2006.

The Malacodays in 2006 were held in May (4th–8th) in : d'árské vrchy in the Czech Republic. It was the ninth meeting of this kind, and the Malacodays are not typical conferences. Not a single lecture is ever delivered or poster shown; there are no ties, posh jackets or banquets. The customary attire is hiking boots, a pair of field trousers (both very dirty after the first few hours) and a shirt or jersey (ditto). Each such meeting lasts three or four days. It is organised in the following way. First, the Czech and/or Slovak malacologists select a place. The place is always a Protected Landscape Area, with good snails and in need of inventory; usually with a convenient field station in its middle. The previous Malacodays were in: 1. 1998 Protected Landscape Area Broumovsko, 2. 1999 PLA Kokořinsko, 3. 2000 PLA Křivoklatsko, 4. 2001 PLA Blaník, 5. 2002 PLA Český Les I, 6. 2003 PLA Český Les II, 7. 2004 PLA Rychlebské hory, 8. 2005 PLA Bukovské vrchy (Slovakia). Once they have decided on a place, they select dates which must be good for collecting, arrange (I think) for a place to sleep cheaply, usually in their field stations, and for collecting permits, and send invites to all the Czech and Slovak malacologists and sometimes to some neighbours (the author of this report and TOMASZ K. MALTZ took part in two Malacodays, in 2004 and 2006). The or-

ganisers I think vary from year to year but we suspect that the most important person behind all this is LUCIE JUŘIČKOVÁ from Charles University in Prague, a 'no problem' girl of infinite patience, good sense of humour, immense organising talents and a motherly attitude to all creatures, including malacologists. The participants are professional malacologists, amateurs and students, their number varies from year to year, but you would be surprised at how many there are. This year we were more than 40 (18 professionals, more than 10 amateurs and about 15 students). Some people bring whoever they can't leave behind: kids (who in this way get a truly malacological upbringing) and/or dogs. There are usually some cars, the most important being LUCIE's huge car we christened Malacobus. People divide in groups of two to five or six, agree on who will visit which sites and off they go! For a whole day, collecting everything terrestrial and freshwater in their sites and leaving no stone unturned. Each evening, before starting the traditional beer drinking session at a fire, people gather in one big room, identify whatever can be identified without dissection and make a preliminary list of the fauna (the rest is identified when people get home, and then they send their identifications to LUCIE or whoever is responsible for writing up the inventory; in fact I suspect it is always LUCIE). And next morning in the field again. Imagine how many sites about forty people with an adequate number of cars can do within three or four days. Afterwards the inventory is published (see, for example, *Folia Malacologica* 13: 9–24 or *Folia Malacologica* 14: 203–215 or 15(1), still in press). A very good idea, this kind of meeting. For professionals an excuse to leave their computers and microscopes and have some fun in a forest, a stream, or in some nice goo. For amateurs – to pursue their beloved hobby. For students – to learn how to collect and identify. For everybody – to discuss molluscs and swap reprints or specimens, exchange recent gossip and have a few drinks. The result – a complete inventory of yet another area, and quite many very happy malacologists (Fig. 1). The two Malacodays we partici-

pated in, Rychlebské hory and : d'árské vrchy, were really great. Fine weather, good snails, nice people and great food in village restaurants. In case you are not familiar with the Czech cuisine, I'll tell you only that a big chunk of grilled cheese or a venison stew with a knedlik [=Czech dumpling], washed down with a pint of local brew, tastes fantastic after a long day of fieldwork. I would recommend this kind of collective collecting session to other countries, only not everywhere so many people are interested in malacology. The Czechs and the Slovaks don't seem to suffer a deficit in this respect.

The 1st Baltic Symposium on Malacology was quite a different affair. It was a real conference, with the subtitle Diversity and Conservation of European Molluscan Fauna. It was held in Riga on September 21st–23rd. The organising and/or supporting institutions were: Latvian Environmental Protection Fund [Latvijas Vides Aizsardzības Fonds], Faculty of Biology, University of Latvia [Bioloģijas Fakultāte, Latvijas Universitāte], Natural History Museum of Latvia [Latvijas Dabas Muzejs] and Latvian Malacological Society [Latvijas Malakologu Biedrība]. The Organising Committee included MUDĪTE RUDŽĪTE, LĪGA OZOLIŅA-MOLL (both University of Latvia) and DIGNA PILĀTE (Natural History Museum of Latvia), the International Scientific Board: INGVAR WÄREBORN (Sweden), JÜRGEN JUNGBLUTH (Germany), GRITA SKUJIENE (Lithuania), ANDRZEJ PIECHOCKI (Poland), ARTHUR

BOGAN (USA), LĪGA OZOLIŅA-MOLL (Latvia) and VOLDEMĀRS SPUNĒIS (Latvia). The number of participants was 29 (possibly more, but 29 are listed in the List of Participants), the number of authors of lectures and posters – 42. The Baltic countries represented were, Latvia (8 people), Lithuania (1), Estonia (1), Germany (2), Sweden (2), Russia (1), Finland (1) and Poland (10 participants plus one accompanying person – the record number; long live Polish malacology!), non-Baltic countries: USA (1), Slovakia (1) and Kirghiz Republic (1). Initially there were rumours about some three rather non-Baltic Nigerian participants but in the end they did not materialise. We stayed in various hotels, scattered all over the city, according to our respective preferences and pockets – ours was very nice. On the first day (21st), afternoon, we registered for the conference, everybody was given the Programme & Abstracts Book (Fig. 2), a Symposium Bag and a Symposium Mug, we listened to three historical lectures: on non-marine malacology in Sweden, malacology in German-speaking countries and malacological science in Latvia and Lithuania. We were given tea, coffee and snacks and shown the Museum. The 22nd was a hard day because the Organisers, probably wanting to leave time enough for the excursion and other pleasures, crammed all the lectures and the poster session in this one day. There were 20 lectures (a lunch break with a very good lunch), followed by the poster session (nine posters)



Fig. 1. Malacodays 2006. Happy malacologists in the Scorpion Valley (Czech Republic) where we even found *Erjavecchia bergeri*. Photo M. HORSÁK

combined with a wine party and snacks (fried *Helix!*) and a tour around the park near the Museum which included collective planting of a tree, to commemorate the First Baltic Symposium (Fig. 3). Most lectures (apart from the historical ones on the first day) and posters (20 presentations in all) had to do with conservation in broad sense (ecology, life cycles, distribution, conservation status and means) and/or alien species; the remaining nine dealt with systematics (1), fossil molluscs (1), variation (2), physiology (1), parasites (1), genetics (1), biogeography (1) and applied malacology (1). Miraculously, nobody exceeded the allotted time and it was even possible to ask a few questions. On the next day we went to see the National Park Īmēri, about 1 hour drive from Riga, with very nice bits of coast, forest and extensive wetlands, and some nice oxbows. Afterwards we had a very good lunch. I must say (and this is everybody's opinion) that the Symposium organisation was absolutely perfect. Everything happened on time, everybody knew what to do and where to go, the relatively very small fee included the abstract book, bag, mug, lunch on the first day and two small receptions (the trip and the other lunch were paid separately but were cheap, too). The only pity was that for those who had to leave just after the Symposium (we left on the morning of the 24th) very little time remained to enjoy the city, with its very beautiful old houses, great harbour, excellent restaurants and unforgettable atmosphere. We hope to go there again, one day. Thanks MUDĪTE, LĪGA and DIGNA, you are truly great girls!

Molluscan Forum is yet another kind of conference. It is special in that only students and amateur malacologists are allowed to present lectures/posters, and only they are entitled to some travel money (Fig. 4). "Attendance is open to all, but speakers and poster presenters should be research students, post-doctoral researchers, undergraduates starting molluscan projects or dissertations and amateurs engaged in substantial projects, which have not yet been published" [from the Foreword to the programme and abstracts of this year's Forum]. Old professional gaffers and grannies are welcome but they have to shut up except for the discussion, and have to pay their expenses. I have been to five such meetings now (I regret to say, with no presentation and paying my expenses) and wholly approve. The Forums are organised by The Malacological Society of London and the Natural History Museum, London; they are always held at the Museum and always at the beginning of November. Young malacologists from various countries, not only from England, can apply for a small travel grant and usually get it. Each Forum lasts one day, full of lectures and posters, and ends with a wine reception. Most people bring reprints of their papers to give away. Reports and some photos from the Forums, as well as abstracts, are usually published by BILL BAILEY in his Bulletin of the Malacological Society of Lon-

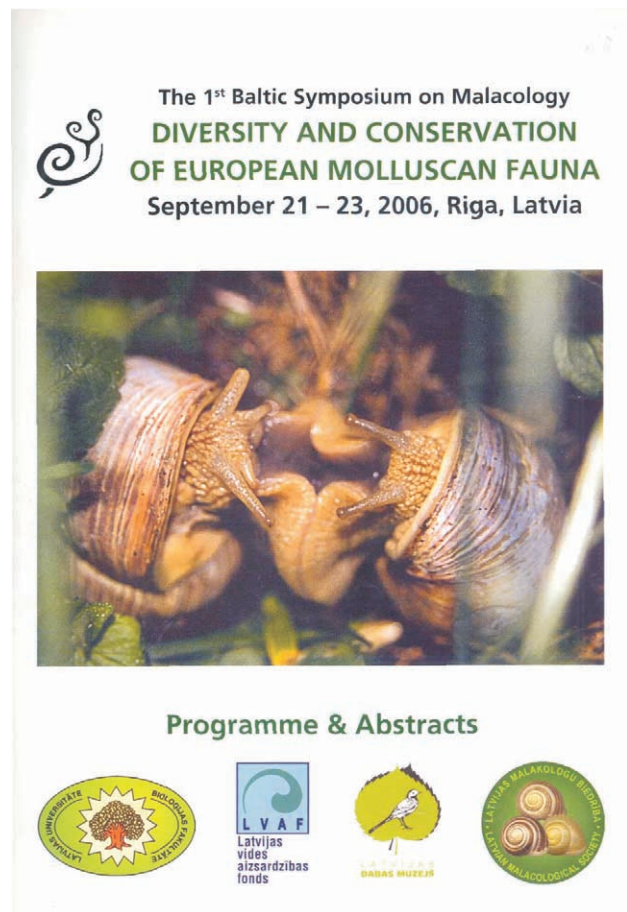


Fig. 2. Programme & Abstracts book of the 1st Baltic Symposium on Malacology

don. The one this year was the 9th. This year the Forum was on the 2nd of November. The Organising Committee included GEORGES DUSSART (Canterbury Christ Church University), ALEX BALL and MANUEL MALAQUIAS (both Natural History Museum). The participants (about 30, plus the said gaffers and grannies) came from the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland and even Sri Lanka (during the previous Forums we also met people from Lithuania, or Hungary for example). The total number of lectures and posters was 26. The range of topics is always very wide, and the same was true this year. To cite the two most remote titles: "Mobility of *Bulgarica cana* in a natural habitat" on the one hand and "Cryoelectron microscopy and single particle analysis of *Nautilus pompilius* hemocyanin under different oxidation states" on the other. Nine presentations were terrestrial, 16 aquatic (marine or freshwater), one about a collection; 13 were about snails or slugs, seven about bivalves, three about both, one each about chitons and cephalopods; nine were ecological in broad sense, 12 were systematic and/or phylogenetic and/or evolutionary, five were neither. You would suspect that people of such different interests and fields of research might not be able to communicate. They did communicate all right, I can tell



Fig. 3. The 1st Baltic Symposium on Malacology. Ceremonial planting of the Symposium tree. Photo T. K. MALTZ



Fig. 4. Molluscan Forum 2006. A young malacologist performing bravely. Photo B. M. POKRYSZKO

you, especially during the reception. It only remains to congratulate The Malacological Society and the Museum on the initiative: no participation fee, travel funds for those who have no money, sometimes the first and only possibility for a young malacologist to present and discuss their results. The end products are many: co-operation, mutual invitations, papers written together, materials exchanged, friendships... name it! For details regarding the next year Forum look at <http://www.malacsoc.org.uk/Molluscanforum07.htm>, in August or September.

Yes, it's been an eventful and satisfactory year for those who like going to conferences. Remember, the real Europe is not during top brass meetings in Brussels or some such place. The real Europe is when we meet and do something together. And when you organise a conference, always remember to invite thy neighbour. Or two. Remember: the next Polish Malacological Seminar is 23-27 April 2007, e-mail of the organisers: semin.malakol@siedlce.pl. Join the fun!

BEATA M. POKRYSZKO
 Museum of Natural History, Wrocław University
 Sinkiewicza 21, 50-335 Wrocław, Poland
 (e-mail: bepok@biol.uni.wroc.pl)