

Minutes of the General Assembly of the European Society of Arachnology, held on Friday, 5th August at the American University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

The President (Søren Toft) opened the meeting at 16.00 by proposing himself as chairman and Jason Dunlop as acting secretary of the meeting. Both were accepted by the Assembly.

Konrad Thaler

The President began by inviting Peter van Helsdingen to offer a tribute to Konrad Thaler, who died unexpectedly shortly before the colloquium. Peter said that this was a sad task concerning the loss of a very dear friend and, at the risk of overlooking other members who are no longer with us, noted that Konrad's death was a great shock which is still very much on people's minds. Peter told us of his disbelief that such a nice man, of whom so much was expected in his retirement, died so young. Konrad was described as a very friendly person, a gentleman, with a great knowledge of the Alpine fauna. Indeed it was during an excursion into the Alps that he died. Peter recalled Konrad's huge library in Innsbruck, and the way he would cover his desk with articles in order to explain things. Konrad was someone who always tried to help, and who found it hard to say no. There was a warm and pleasant atmosphere around him and his office was a centre of arachnology; always full of guests and students. Peter recalled his first meeting with Konrad in Brno and said that many of us have worked with him and share the feelings of loss. Peter said we will miss Konrad, but we will think of him and keep him in our memories. He asked us to think of his wife Barabara too, and then invited the Assembly to stand for a minute's silence in memory of Konrad; which was duly observed.

President's report

The President outlined the agenda for the rest of the meeting and raised three main points for his own report. First, the main activity of the European Society of Arachnology (ESA) is securing colloquia. This has been achieved with the present successful meeting in Blagoevgrad and by securing an offer for the coming year (2006).

The second point is the previous decision to send copies of colloquium proceedings to members who were unable to attend meetings. This was introduced as a service to members and seems to be very popular. The President stressed that such proceedings are only sent to members who paid their ESA dues in the *year of that colloquium*. This has been done twice now with the proceedings of the Szombartely (2002) and St Petersburg (2003) meetings. The President announced our intention to continue to do this in future, but noted that this may have financial consequences for the society (see below).

The third point was the homepage. As mentioned at the St Petersburg colloquium, the society developed a new website to inform members about arachnological issues in Europe. Part of this website includes electronic versions of all articles from certain previous meetings; specifically Siedlce, Edinburgh, Stará Lesná, Århus and Szombathely. It is intended to add articles from older proceedings eventually, although it will take some time for the results of all 22 meetings to be included.

Nevertheless, this is important as older proceedings in particular can be difficult to obtain, even from libraries.

The President also announced the intention to use our homepage more actively as a means of information exchange or 'news page' and encouraged members to offer contributions. He further drew attention to recently introduced photo galleries – of which there are so far two, European harvestmen and ballooning spiders – and asked members to send in additional photographic material. Another important feature newly available is Peter van Helsdingen's database for the *Fauna Europea* project. The presence of the data in an Excel format allows much faster updates than through the *Fauna Europea* site and the ESA homepage now includes an online form for adding new local records which can be sent to Peter for inclusion in the database. The President asked members to check species lists for their own regions and submit any new *published* records. Finally, the website includes an online membership form and the President asked the Assembly to encourage new members.

The President invited comments on his report. Rudy Jocqué asked who actually does the scanning of old proceedings to which the President replied that the server is in Århus and that a member of the technical staff in his department acts as webmaster and is responsible for adding things to the ESA homepage. There were no further comments on the President's report which was duly accepted by the Assembly.

Treasurer's report

The Treasurer (Léon Baert) noted that since there was no European colloquium last year his report covers two financial years, namely 2003–2004. At the start of 2003 there was € 880.78 on the account and € 319.06 in cash, giving a total of € 1199.84. Incomes from membership for 2003 were € 473.91 (on account) and € 808.80 (in cash), giving a total of € 1282.71. Expenses for 2003 were € 750.00 given to support the organisers of the 21st Colloquium in St Petersburg. Thus for the year 2003 there was a surplus of € + 532.71.

At the start of 2004 there was € 1354.69 on the account and € 377.86 in cash, giving a total of € 1732.55. Incomes for 2004 were € 480.18 (on account) and € 930.00 (in cash), giving a total of € 1410.18. Since this was not a European colloquium year there were expenses in terms of supporting a meeting, but there *were* expenses of € 1005.50 for extra copies of the Szombathely proceedings and for postage. Thus for the year 2004 there was a surplus of € + 404.68 and the year ended with € 834.87 (on account) and 1302.36 (in cash), giving a total of € 2137.23.

Provisionally for 2005, the Treasurer announced there has been a poor income from membership fees of only ca. € 360 (on account) and € 230 (cash). Extra copies of proceedings for the St Petersburg conference will cost € 822.85 and printing and postage of issue 14 of the *Bulletin* will cost € 285.20. This means a provisional deficit of € - 518.05. To this come predicted expenses of another € 680 for further proceedings and € 1000 for supporting the 22nd (Blagoevgrad) colloquium. This implies a total deficit of ca. € - 1700, although an additional ca. € 500 in membership fees was collected during the present colloquium. This means that ESA cannot afford in future to sponsor both colloquia *and* additional proceedings for the non-attending members. The suggestion from the

Treasurer was therefore that only the extra copies of the proceedings should be funded by ESA in future.

The President invited comments and questions on the Treasurer's report. Rudy Jocqué asked if the membership fee is sufficient to cover producing a copy of the proceedings, otherwise the system would be unbalanced. The Treasurer replied that fees *do* cover production costs, adding that the proceedings *are* affordable, but that cash reserves remain low. The President reminded the meeting that those attending colloquia receive the proceedings as part of their registration fees. Joachim Haupt asked how much financial support was given to meetings, for example compared to the € 750 for St Petersburg. The Treasurer reminded the meeting that € 1000 from ESA was made available to the Blagoevgrad organisers. Theo Blick stated that the real problem has been that we are only getting about € 1200 out of the expected € 2000 per year from the members.

The Treasurer stated that as of August 1st 2005 there are 149 registered members plus 6 honorary individuals and 3 exchanges. Of these, about 20% were fully paid up to 2005, 20% to 2004, 20% to 2003, 12% to 2002 and some 13% don't pay at all (including of course the honorary members). The President proposed that ESA does not increase membership fees at the present time, but instead concentrates financial support on producing extra copies of future proceedings; rather than supporting the colloquia in general as we have done in the past. Dirk Kunz asked whether it was effectively cheaper to get colloquium proceedings by not attending the meetings, to which Theo Blick replied that the colloquium fee is lower for members. The President confirmed there should be at least a € 20 price difference for registration and indeed it *should* have been € 40 this year which would make attending a colloquium and not joining [for € 20] uneconomic. This larger price differential should be implemented at future meetings.

Peter Jäger asked whether colloquium fees would rise in general and noted that in the *Arachnologische Gesellschaft* they raised membership fees and offered members more for their money. The President repeated the points about the registration fee differences for members and non-members and the fact that proceedings tend to come about a year after meetings and that members only receive copies for years in which they have paid. Jakob Walter asked how much producing and posting a proceedings' copy to non-attendees cost and the President replied that it was about € 20. Gernot Bergthaler asked whether people not attending meetings should simply receive electronic versions, adding that most members have internet access. The President replied that this could be an option if the financial circumstances do not improve, but restated the original idea that people would want to join ESA in order to receive hard copies of our publications. The Treasurer voiced his concern that if proceedings were available online people may choose not to pay their membership dues. The President added that the recent colloquium volumes – but not the older ones – will be password-protected and thus only available to members.

There were no more questions and the Treasurer's report was accepted to general acclaim.

Auditors' report

Volker Mahnert reported that on behalf of the auditors (Peter Horak and himself) that the financial accounts of the society had been verified and found to be in good order. Volker thanked the Treasurer for his work and the report was accepted to general acclaim.

Secretary's report

The secretary (Christine Rollard) reported nine new members who joined during the present colloquium: Angelo Bolzern (Switzerland), Ole Gudik-Sørensen (Denmark), Siegfried Huber (Germany), Anja Klann (Germany), Kevin Lambeets (Belgium), Peter Michalik (Germany), Plamen Mitov (Bulgaria), Velin Radenkov (Bulgaria) and Valerio Vignoli (Italy). The new members were welcomed with applause.

Honorary members

The President informed Assembly that we currently have six honorary members and that the constitution allows up to ten. Two new honorary members were thus proposed. The first was Eric Duffey. The President explained that Eric Duffey was a spider ecologist with strong interests in nature conservancy. He was a great inspiration to later generations of ecologists (the President included), particularly through his work on ballooning spiders in which the ballooners could be correlated with their original populations. Modern concepts relating to grass and sand-dune spider ecology can all be traced back to Eric Duffey's work.

The second candidate was Jerzy Prószyński who was particularly noted for a lifetime's work on salticids and his major online catalogue of the group. He was someone who grasped the potential of the internet for spider research very early on and began to collect the illustrations which form the basis of the present catalogue. The President also reminded the meeting that in the decade before 1989, when travel out of Eastern Europe was difficult, Jerzy Prószyński did much to help people from these countries to attend international meetings and that the current strong showing of people from these regions owes much to his influence.

The President invited the Assembly to approve the nominations and both proposals were accepted to general applause.

Suggestions from the Assembly

The President invited members to make suggestions to council. Joachim Haupt raised some practical points about finances asking where the account is held, account number, and so on. He suggested that any letters sent should include these account details. The Treasurer answered that this was already the case and that personal reminders are sent out including bank details, swift codes, etc. Peter Jäger commented that the system did not seem to be working, at least in Germany, and the Treasurer added that there are problems paying, for example, from a Belgian account into a French one.

23rd colloquium

The President invited Carles Ribera to make a proposal for the 2006 meeting. Carles noted that a spider-related conference was held some 25 years ago in Barcelona (Spain) and that the faculty of biology had given him permission to hold a colloquium next year in this city. Carles briefly discussed the merits of Barcelona as a city and of the surrounding countryside. He noted that August would not be good (for example the university is closed in this month), that July is fully booked and so that the first week in September would be most convenient. This has the added advantage of not being in the middle of the tourist season (and thus cheaper) with better chances of hostel accommodation. The President invited questions and/or further proposals. None were received and Barcelona was accepted as the venue of the 23rd European Colloquium of Arachnology in 2006 to general acclaim.

Elections

The Secretary announced that four members of council had reached the end of their current terms: Maciej Bartos, Alain Canard, Christine Rollard and Ferenc Samu. All were eligible to stand again for re-election, although only Christine and Ferenc had chosen to do so. Maciej and Alain would thus retire from service. Council nominated Christo Deltshev (Bulgaria) and Rajko Dimitrijevic (Serbia) as new council members in their place and the votes received were: Christo Deltshev (44), Christine Rollard (43), Ferenc Samu (41) and Rajko Dimitrijevic (28). Other candidates nominated by members during the election received only a handful of votes all the four named above were duly elected to council.

The President then paid particular tribute to Alain Canard as someone who had spent nine years on council, six of them as president. Alain's contribution was recognised by general acclaim from the Assembly.

Other business

There was no other business. The President concluded with a vote of thanks for Christo Deltshev and his support and technical staff for a magnificent colloquium and this was greeted with general acclaim by the Assembly.

The meeting was closed at 16.55.

Jason Dunlop,
Berlin, 12th August 2005.