

Minutes of the General Assembly of the European Society of Arachnology held on 28th August, 2008 at the University of Bern, Switzerland, as part of the 24th European Congress of Arachnology

The general assembly was opened at 18.10 by SØREN TOFT (Aarhus), representing the council, who proposed himself as chairman of the meeting and JASON DUNLOP (Berlin) as secretary. Both were accepted to general acclaim and the Chairman proceeded to outline the agenda, before inviting FERENC SAMU (Budapest) to present the President's Report.

President's report

The President began by stating what he considered to be the four main functions of the society: (1) holding regular meetings, (2) publishing proceedings, (3) sharing and disseminating knowledge about arachnids, and (4) maintaining a coherent self-image. Each of these points was then addressed in detail.

Next colloquium: Alexandropolis 2009

The President reminded the meeting that the assembly voted in Sitges 2007 to accept the Greek proposal for 2009. Unfortunately, no-one from Greece was available to attend the meeting in Bern, but the President informed the assembly that MARIA CHATZAKI had confirmed her willingness to host and coordinate next-years colloquium, which will be held in **Alexandropolis** in north-eastern Greece. The President explained that this is a small town near the coast, close to a number of important natural areas such as the Evros delta, Nestos river and Dadia natural park.

The President informed the meeting that the proposed dates were late August or early September and that he would like to gauge opinion about which date would be preferable so that this information could be passed onto the organisers. A show of hands was fairly evenly split with a slight preference for September. The President then reminded the meeting that an international congress would be held in 2010 in Poland, but that future venues for European meetings – particularly for 2011 and 2012 – would be very welcome.

Brno 2011?

STANO PEKAR (Brno) informed the meeting that 2011 would be the 40th anniversary of the last (international) meeting to be held there in 1971. It was established that among those present in Bern, at least CHRISTO DELTSHEV, TORBJORN KRONESTEDT and PETER VAN HELSDINGEN were veterans of this 1971 congress. STANO PEKAR wondered if it was too soon to host a Czech meeting after the Slovak one in 1999 and mentioned some potential problems involving extensive renovation work at Brno

University which might mean a conference centre would have to be used instead. In summary, STANO PEKAR promised to decide by next year's colloquium whether a Czech proposal for 2011 was feasible and his provisional offer was greeted to general acclaim.

Colloquium guidelines

The President informed the meeting that council had agreed a set of colloquium guidelines – available from the website – which draw upon the traditions of recent colloquia and aim to help future organisers, as well as regulating some financial issues.

Proceedings papers available online

The President announced that pdf versions of papers from *all* previous proceedings are now available online from the society website. The process of scanning in back issues was initiated by SØREN TOFT and is now complete. Password-protection has been removed from all volumes over two years old, such that only the most recent proceedings remain protected. The President informed the meeting that he had asked all previous colloquium hosts if this arrangement would be acceptable and all had given their consent. Future proceedings should try to follow the format of the Aarhus volume and the long-term goal of an annual series – perhaps also publishing in international congress years – and/or a dedicated European journal was noted.

Sharing knowledge

The President stated that the website was especially important for sharing information about arachnids and reminded the meeting that SAMUEL ZSCHOKKE (Basel) had recently taken over as webmaster; a fact which was immediately acknowledged to general applause. The President explained that there had been few major changes, but that a certain amount of functional 'tidying-up' had been carried out. The President invited further suggestions from the members with respect to the website's content or format.

Self-image

The President was pleased to announce a ca. 20% increase in membership over the last two years: specifically from 179 to 218. He also added that we now directly sponsor two prizes (for best oral presentation by a young scientist) at the colloquia. The President suggested that the website is a key part of our image and stressed the importance of maintaining links to other groups or projects, such as the numerous national/regional arachnological societies, the European spider of the year and *Fauna Europaea*.

Finances

The President informed the meeting that the society is financially stable and that there are now mutual arrangements with the *British Arachnological Society* and the *Arachnological Gesellschaft* to pay membership fees through these other bodies. The hope is to expand these possibilities and negotiations with, e.g., the *American Arachnological Society* and the *International Society of Arachnology* are either planned or underway.

Discussion of the President's report

The Chairman invited comments on the President's report from the members. PETER VAN HELSDINGEN (Leiden) favoured having proceedings in a standard format and enquired why of the ca. 70 talks offered at the 2007 Sitges meeting only 16 or 17 ended up as printed contributions? CARLES RIBERA (Barcelona) explained that the deadline for submission was November of 2006 and that of the manuscripts received two had to be rejected and two further authors refused to carry out amendments requested by the referees. PETER JÄGER (Frankfurt/Main) reminded the meeting that students in particular need to publish high-quality, peer-reviewed papers in good journals, but PETER VAN HELSDINGEN responded that the proceedings should reflect those contributions made at the meetings. The President agreed that we shouldn't go back to the older (non-reviewed) type of proceedings, nor should we accept weak manuscripts, but that we should strive for a prestigious series of publications whose scientific value needs to be increased.

WOLFGANG NENTWIG (Bern) expressed reservations about the future of the proceedings, since papers published here have essentially no value for young researchers' careers, and the proceedings' scientific value may even go down rather than improve. He added that to establish a journal of our own would require much organisation. The President expressed his hope that this pessimistic view does not turn out to be the case and raised again the point about articles being in pdf format, which can then be widely and easily distributed. PETER JÄGER mentioned the *Zootaxa / Zookeys* model and the possibility that *Zootaxa* will produce special volumes in future which could be arachnid-related. PETER MICHALIK (Greifswald) drew attention to the competitive environment that young scientists find themselves in, such that good results can be presented at colloquia but would not be submitted to a proceedings volume. CHRISTIAN KROPF (Bern) added that this problem is not restricted to younger colleagues, and that more senior scientists are also assessed for grants based primarily on papers in high-profile journals with strong impact factors.

WOLFGANG NENTWIG stated again the importance of quality and that his own students would always be advised to seek high-profile journals preferentially. SAMUEL ZSCHOKKE suggested that where colloquium contributions are not submitted to the proceedings, then at least the information about where they are (or will be) published could be included. SØREN TOFT questioned whether the proceedings was the most appropriate place for this and suggested the website as an alternative,

while THEO BLICK (Frankfurt/Main) reminded the meeting that even summaries of non-published contributions are available in the accompanying abstract booklet of the meetings.

The President then raised the question, should we include extended abstracts in future proceedings? WOLFGANG NENTWIG asked if this meant for the meeting after Bern, as the abstracts for the present meeting were mostly too short to be included as meaningful published contributions. SØREN TOFT again drew the meeting's attention to the existing abstract volume available anyway and raised the possibility of putting the abstracts online, as was done for example at the Hungarian meeting. He added that tracing places of publication is now relatively straightforward via the internet and YAEL LUBIN (Ben-Gurion Uni.) agreed that it was easy to find modern papers, such that stating their place of publication in a colloquium proceedings may be largely irrelevant. She supported the idea of having abstracts online. MIQUEL ARNEDO (Barcelona) questioned whether we need a proceedings volume at all – given that there are various arachnological journals already available – and wondered whether some form of newsletter or pdf of abstracts would be more appropriate.

The President suggested that we should gather statistics about previous volumes and that – with the exception of the Sitges meeting – most of the earlier colloquium proceedings were reasonably well-filled. The President expressed his feeling that there is still a niche for a colloquium proceedings and that we should maintain this tradition and try and build it into a serious publication. SØREN TOFT added that the situation regarding the proceedings could become critical. CARLES RIBERA felt that this could apply to the future of the society in general and favoured the idea of a proper journal; reminding the meeting that many societies exist primarily to provide a regular journal to their members. The President concluded by supporting, in principle, the idea of a European arachnological journal.

The Chairman then invited further comments. None were forthcoming and the President's report was accepted to general acclaim.

Treasurer's report

In the absence of the Treasurer, the Chairman invited the Vice-Treasurer (CHRISTIAN KROPPF) to make the presentation. The Vice-Treasurer explained that since documents for auditing were unfortunately not available this year, council suggests that the members formally vote for the report over two years at the 2009 colloquium. This proposal met no opposition and for the meantime a summary of our 2008 financial position was presented.

- In January we had assets of € 3,018.24 on account and € 190.00 in cash for a total of **€ 3,208.24**.
- Income from members' fees was € 1,248.10 on account and € 390.00 in cash for a total of **€ 1,638.10**.
- Additionally, we received **\$ 76.00** in membership fees.
- Expenses were € 1.500 support for the Sitges meeting and € 20.15 in taxes for a total of **€ 1,520.15**.
- Income minus expenditure for 2008 thus yields (so far) a positive balance of **+ € 117.95**.
- As of 30th July 2008 we have € 3,299.19 on account and € 27.00 in cash for a total of **€ 3,326.19**.

- NB: this total does not include the additional 76.00 US dollars.

The Chairman asked the meeting if they would accept this provisional report, and this was agreed to general acclaim.

Changes to the Statues

The Chairman then invited the President to outline and propose a number of amendments to the Statutes of the society.

Reserve seats on council for colloquium organisers

The President again mentioned the recently introduced colloquium guidelines and explained that preparations for future meetings should prove easier if the main organiser of a forthcoming event were already part of the council. The proposal was thus made to **reserve two of the twelve seats on council for the organisers of forthcoming society meetings**. In detail, councillors thus appointed would serve a three-year term beginning either one or two years prior to their own meeting – depending on where it falls in relation to an international congress – and would commence immediately such that only *five* new members would be elected in the present round and MARIA CHATZAKI would automatically receive the sixth vacant position by virtue of organising the 2009 meeting.

Voting procedures

Problems with current voting practices were discussed and the cumbersome system of relying heavily on postal votes was cited as an obstacle to efficient elections. The proposal was to **allow more flexible voting**, such that the majority of votes cast would be made on a ballot paper distributed during meetings and postal / e-mail votes would largely be needed only for members unable to attend colloquia.

'Functional Bureau' and Bulletin

Both terms remain in the statutes even though they are effectively obsolete; the Bulletin for example has not been produced for several years. The proposal was to **delete references to both the 'Functional Bureau' and the Bulletin from the Statutes**.

Change of meeting name from Colloquium to Congress

WOLFGANG NENTWIG raised an additional point, stating that 'colloquium' was a rather old-fashioned name, implicit of a small-scale gathering, and that 'conference' or 'congress' sounded better. He favoured a change of the meeting name; as was indeed done at the present meeting in Bern and

which, significantly, made securing sponsorship and support somewhat easier. The proposal was therefore made to **formally change the name of the meeting from European Colloquium to European Congress of Arachnology**. The President added that there were numerous practical advantages in favour of calling it a congress, but conceded that there was an emotional attachment to the tradition of calling it a colloquium.

Discussion of proposed changes to Statutes

The President agreed to include the proposal to change the meeting name to the list of amendments to be voted on. SAMUEL ZSCHOKKE added a further point (an oversight on the agenda) from council's previous discussions for the voting procedures, whereby it was further proposed that **elections should only be held in colloquium years** (i.e. two years out of three) **and that half the seats on council should come up for election in these years**. Previously there were elections every year for a third of all council seats.

The Chairman invited comment from the members and JOACHIM HAUPT (Berlin) pointed out that the composition of the people attending meetings does not exactly mirror the membership of the society. The President stated that members unable to attend meetings will still be able to vote in advance by post or e-mail as beforehand.

There were no further comments and the Chairman invited the meeting to vote on the proposed changes to the Statutes. All proposals were accepted unanimously, and can thus be adopted with immediate effect having achieved the required two-thirds majority.

Results of elections

The society Secretary (CHRISTINE ROLLARD, Paris) announced the results of elections to council. Of the 218 members, 44 cast their votes, 11 of which proved invalid – seemingly due in part to some misunderstandings of the ballot form. The results were: LÉON BAERT (Belgium) 28, CHRISTINE ROLLARD (France) 28, FERENC SAMU (Hungary) 26, CHRISTO DELTSHEV (Bulgaria) 22, MARK JUDSON (France) 17, RAJKO DIMITRIJEVIC (Serbia) 8. All other candidates received 5 votes or less.

Since the meeting had already accepted the proposed change in the statutes (see above) reserving one place on council for future congress organisers, the six new (or returning) members of council become: BAERT, CHATZAKI, DELTSHEV, JUDSON, ROLLARD & SAMU.

- As a reminder, the other six seats on council are currently held by: BLICK, DUNLOP, KROPF, RIBERA, TOFT & ZSCHOKKE. Following the change in the statutes, *five* seats will be elected next year (2009) with the sixth now reserved for the organiser of the 2011 meeting. There will now be no election in 2010, and five vacant seats will be voted on in 2011 with one seat reserved for the organiser of the 2012 meeting, etc.

Other business

The Chairman invited any other business. PETER VAN HELSDINGEN asked if it was traditional to remember arachnologists who have died since the previous meeting; specifically in this case MICHAEL SAARISTO of Finland. The Chairman agreed that this was usual. LEOS KLIMES of the Czech Republic was briefly discussed, but is officially regarded as missing in the Himalayas and YURI MARUSIK (Magadan) additionally mentioned SONG DA-XIANG of China, S. OCHINNIKOV of Russia and TAMARA MKHEIDZE of Georgia. The Chairman asked members to stand for a minute's silence which was duly observed.

The President then asked the meeting if there were any suggestions for honorary members of the society. No immediate suggestions were received.

Vote of thanks

The Chairman concluded the meeting by stressing once again the importance of the congresses and, also from personal experience, the amount of work which goes into organising them. For this reason he invited members to offer a vote of thanks to the principal organisers, WOLFGANG NENTWIG and MARTIN SCHMIDT of Bern University and CHRISTIAN KROPF from the Natural History Museum, along with the rest of their team of students and helpers.

The efforts of the congress team were roundly applauded by the meeting.

The Chairman then closed the general assembly at 19.15.

Jason Dunlop
Berlin, 1st September, 2008