

THE SIXTH CONGRESS OF EUROPEAN MALACOLOGICAL SOCIETIES

CONFERENCE REPORT

The Sixth Congress of the European Malacological Societies was held on 18–22 July 2011 in Vitoria-Gasteiz in Spain. The main organiser was Dr. BENJAMIN GÓMEZ-MOLINER from the Universidad Pais Vasco. The participants representing 19 countries presented a total of 45 lectures and 76 posters. Nearly half of the participants were Spanish; from our part of Europe the Lithuanians (5 people) and the Czechs (4 people) were the best represented.

There were the following sessions: Endangered Species and Hot-spots of Biodiversity; Biology, Reproduction and Molluscs Culture; Invasive Alien Species; Ecology; Systematics and Taxonomy of Western-Palaeartic Mollusca; Biogeography and Phylogeography of the Mediterranean Region and Macaronesia. Each session started with an invited lecture.

DAVID ALDRIDGE spoke about using the knowledge of biology and ecology of invasive bivalve species to control them more effectively. We learned about the practical aspects of the – now fashionable – commercialisation of science and what economic losses (the order of millions of dollars) molluscs caused. MARKUS PFENNINGER showed examples of studies on Mediterranean snails (among others the genera *Tudorella* and *Candidula*), where – thanks to taxonomic and phylogeographic methods – an array of cryptic species were discovered and migration routes of various insular populations could be traced. MARCO OLIVERIO pointed to the possibility offered by genetic studies while explaining the population structure and genetic diversity of related planktotrophic and non-planktotrophic snail species. MARY SEDDON told us about criteria used when constructing global red lists. She also characterised the present situation of molluscs, pointing out that, depending on the region, from 18 to 33% of species were endangered, while the Red List of IUCN of 2011 included more than 1,500 species (in 2008 the number was less than 1,000), which reflected the poor situation of mollusc protection.

The lectures and posters presented by the remaining participants dealt mainly with terrestrial (18 oral presentations and 28 posters) and marine molluscs (14+28); the freshwater fauna was less popular (10+15). The topics varied widely, but phylogeography (36) and ecology (34) were the best represented. Fewer participants presented results of studies on biology and development, physiology, histology or conservation. The sessions were in English, there was however an exception: we listened to the lecture on speciation in a vermetid, *Dendropoma petraeum* in Spanish.

There was a competition for the best lecture and poster for students and doctoral students. The prizes, as it turned out, were worth the effort. During the farewell lunch which took place in a vineyard, each of the winners (i.a. KAROL DOUDA from the Czech Republic and LEILA CARMONA from Spain) was given a huge bottle of Marques de Riscal, 2006. Another prize was awarded to the youngest and very patient and diligent participant – BENJAMIN REISE.

The book “Atlas y Libro Rojo de Los Moluscos de Castilla-La Mancha” (Atlas and Red Book of Molluscs of Castilla – La Mancha) by DOLORES BRAGADO, RAFAEL ARAUJO and TERESA APARICIO, given to each participant as a part of the conference materials, should be mentioned. It is an excellently published book, richly illustrated with both photos and distribution maps, and it includes molluscs of all five provinces of the Castille-La Mancha commonwealth, situated in central Spain. The description of each species includes its systematic position, diagnostic characters, habitat with distribution and conservation status with proposed further action. The data, collected since 2003, come both from the literature and from special field studies conducted since 2007; information from the collection of the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Madrid and from private persons was also used. Unfortunately, the book is entirely in Spanish and preparing of a more penetrative review should be entrusted to Spanish-speaking people.



Fig. 1. The Congress participants in the vineyard Marques de Riscal, Laguardia

BENJAMIN GÓMEZ-MOLINER and the whole team of young people who helped him deserve great thanks for creating the excellent atmosphere which favoured scientific discussion and getting to know each other really well.

Like the conference organisation, the weather favoured sitting through the sessions. The cold and strong wind discouraged the participants from spending their time in fresh air and enjoying the – barely visible – Spanish sun. On the other hand, the cool aura favoured expeditions during which we could, without effort and sweat, see the most important places in northern Spain. Besides visiting Vitoria-Gastez, we managed to see Bilbao, Pampeluna and San Sebastian (the expeditions never included all our contingent because someone had to represent us in the sessions). Vitoria is a small academic centre, with a characteristic old town whose centre is a large, trapeziform square with houses, with beautiful, glazed verandahs. Its most famous historic building is a Gothic cathedral which we visited wearing helmets. This 14th c. cathedral grew gradually as the town developed, but the fact that it is a huge building set on old foundations which would be proper for a small, primitive temple, resulted in cracking of the walls and deformation of the ceiling. Due to the spectacular damage, the cathedral is known among the architects and building experts worldwide. Regretfully, the chances of saving it are small. Pampeluna, famous for its annual bull race, is a small charming town with a beautiful town hall; the beginning of the festivities is announced from its balcony. We went to San Sebastian on a train, in a rain and with no prospect of weather improvement. Much to our surprise, the “pearl of the ocean” greeted us with sun and a nice view of the bay. Equally unexpectedly, a heavy rain

started and drove us to have yet another meal. In Bilbao, each of us visited the museum of modern art (Guggenheim Museum), designed by Frank Gehry, separately which depended on the arrival and departure hours; the nearest airport was near Bilbao.

It is impossible not to mention our culinary adventures. The Spanish taverns and bars tempted us with their variety of colourful and delicious tapas. We also enjoyed the offer of the traditional Basque restaurant. Very nice conversations with the waiters were conducted in a variety of ways: starting with Polish up through imitating animal noises to specify the origin of the meat. The culinary delights included the expedition to the land of La Rioja Alavesa, where they produce excellent wine and to the salt valley – Salinas de Añana, where we could watch the traditional method of salt production and the branchiopod crustaceans – *Artemia salina* – very abundant in the salty water. We will certainly remember the trip for a long time.

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