

WORLD CONGRESS OF MALACOLOGY PONTA DELGADA, AZORES (PORTUGAL), 2013 JULY 21–28

CONFERENCE REPORT

The World Congress of Malacology happens once in three years (the previous one was held in Phuket, Thailand, in 2010, see: *Folia Malacologica* 19(2): 107–116, 2011). It has a long tradition, albeit prior to 2004 it had a different name and was always held in Europe. Since 2004 the Congresses have alternated between Europe (every other Congress) and overseas locations. Whatever you call the event and wherever it is held, its style remains the same.

The last one (18th) was held in Ponta Delgada in the Azores. Both the city and the University of the Azores which was the Congress venue were already known to some of us from a previous malacological occasion (The Fifth Congress of European Malacological Societies 2008, see: *Folia Malacologica* 16(4): 231–232, 2008). The city is beautiful and fairly easy to get to though the island of Sao Miguel is quite far from mainland Portugal.

The Organising Committee included: ANTONIO M. DE FRIAS MARTINS, ANA CRISTINA RICARDO MATOS COSTA, PEDRO MIGUEL VALENTE RAPOSEIRO, REGINA MARIA PIRES TOSTE TRISTAO DA CUNHA, SERGIO AVILA, SANDRA CARMEN MONTEIRO “...and many, who helped in various ways” (Book of Abstracts, p. 13). The Scientific Committee was composed of 26 people from 12 countries. We thank the Organisers listed above, and our thanks go also (and especially) to the big group of young people dressed in bright yellow T-shirts with the Congress logo. They were students, technicians and young researchers (not always malacologists) who supervised the smooth turning of the Congress’ everyday wheels: computers, projectors, receipts, invoices, information etc., and handled everything splendidly.

The number of participants listed in the Book of Abstracts was 425 but, as is always the case at conferences with so many people registered, some could not make it and the actual number was about 380. That was more than the 320 in Thailand in 2010, but less than the numbers during some earlier Congresses in

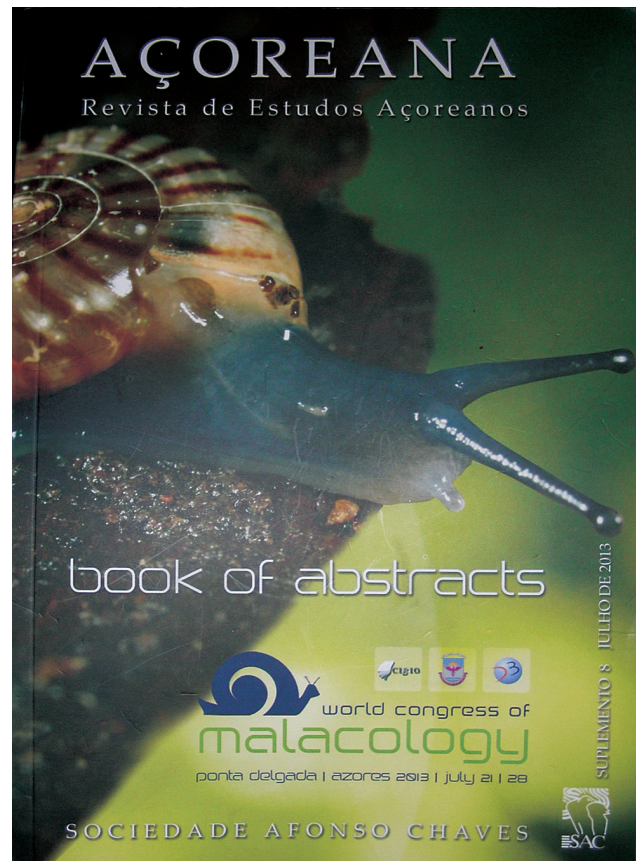


Fig. 1. Book of Abstracts

Europe, for example Vienna, probably because of the so called crisis: it is becoming increasingly difficult to find funds to attend conferences. The participants came from 45 countries, the best represented being the US (75 persons), Portugal (49), Germany (48), Spain (29), the UK (27) and Brazil (25). They were followed by Austria (15), The Czech Republic and Poland (14 each), Japan and Russia (12 each), France (11), Canada (8), Norway (7), The Netherlands (6), Australia and Italy (5 each), Nigeria, Philippines,

South Africa and Sweden (4 each), Belgium, Denmark, Hungary and New Zealand (3 each), Bulgaria, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, Northern Ireland, Israel, Romania, Switzerland and Venezuela (2 each), Barbados, China, Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Iran, Mozambique, Nepal, Taiwan, Tanzania and Tunisia (1 each). The number of people from Poland was surprisingly high, considering the total number of malacologists in the country and the mean number of participants during the last three Malacological Seminars (about 50): there were 14 participants plus three accompanying persons. Malacology seems to be getting younger all the time, and it is not only because we, the old generation, are retiring and dying out. I can't of course present the age structure based on hard data (there are no birth dates in the Book of Abstracts) but the number of spectacularly young people at the Congress was amazing. And this despite our constant complaints about the shortage of money for masters' and doctoral students!

The total number of presentations in the Book of Abstracts (Fig. 1) was 435, and 162 of them were posters. The total number of authors was 979 which, by simply calculating the author to presentation ratio (2.25:1), tells you something about co-authorship. Indeed, there were only 77 single-author presentations and as many as 358 presentations with two or more authors. The greatest number of authors to one presentation was 37 (if you don't believe me, check it: Book of Abstracts p. 202), whereas the greatest number of presentations in which the same person appeared as one of the authors was 12. Nice to see so much co-operation, especially that as many as 113 presentations were by international teams, and about as many could be classified as truly interdisciplinary. Most of the

many-author presentations were co-authored by both sexes (the number of boys & girls presentations was 263). The number of girls-only presentations (by single girl authors or girl teams) was 44, the respective number for boys was 128. The numbers of marine, freshwater and terrestrial presentations were 247, 70 and 118, respectively. Among them gastropods featured in 263, bivalves in 112 and other taxa (mainly cephalopods and chitons) in 69.

The presentations were divided among symposia and general themes. There were the following symposia: Living in the extreme: molluscan communities of chemosynthetic habitats; Tempo and mode in land snail evolution: the origins and limits of diversity; Molecular phylogenetics and paleontology; Biodiversity and evolution of pulmonate taxa; Who are the 'Aculifera'?; How did they get here?: (palaeo)biogeography of terrestrial and marine molluscs; There's something about Opisthobranchia; Gains and losses of freshwater bivalves and their consequences for ecosystems; Mudflat molluscs; Climate change and molluscan eco-physiology; Invasive molluscs; Colour in molluscs; The role of cephalopods in marine ecosystems; Taxonomy and ecology of freshwater molluscs in the molecular age. The general themes included: Reproduction, Bivalves, Structure, Biodiversity, Environmental effects, Ecology issues, Metabolism, Population issues.

The graph in Fig. 2 shows a somewhat simplified topical structure of the sessions (compared also to the previous Congress and to the sum total of presentations from the last seven Polish Malacological Seminars). Because of their interdisciplinary character many papers had to be classified in more than one category. Ecology & conservation and systematics & phylogeny seem to be the most popular branches of

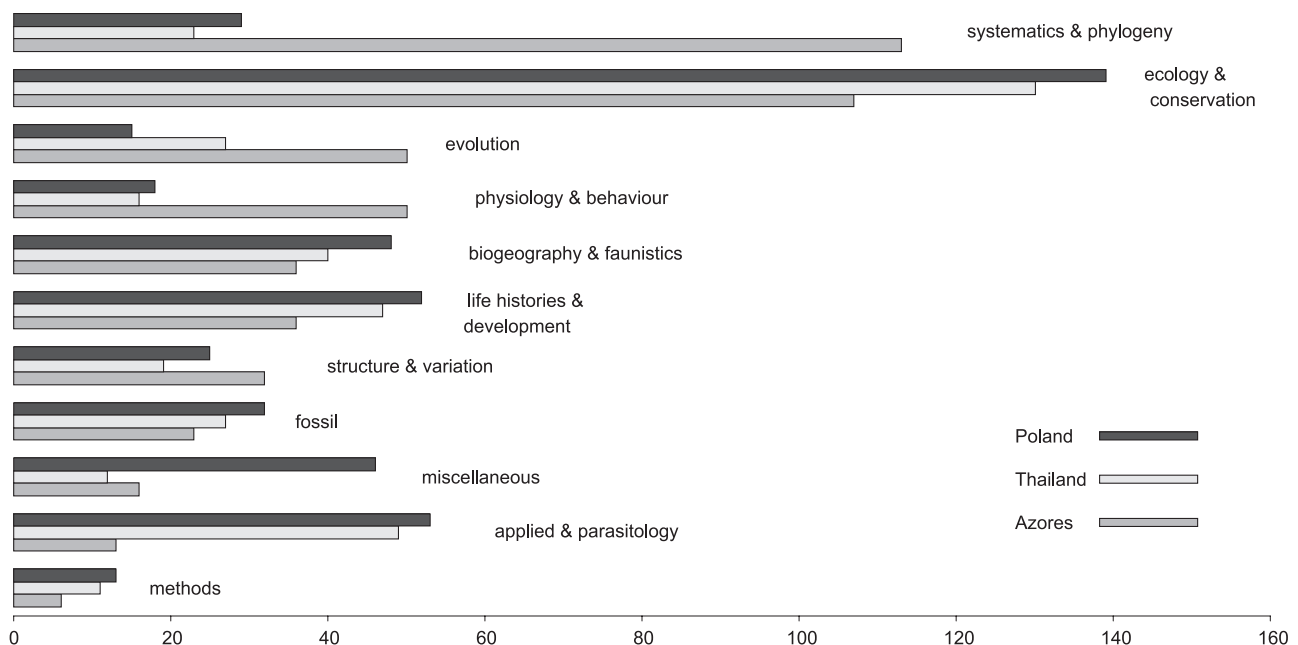


Fig. 2. Graph showing the topical structure of the last two Congresses and the last seven Polish Malacological Seminars



Figs 3–8. Snapshots of the Congress: 3 – President being interviewed by the local TV; 4 – prize-giving ceremony; 5 – JANA ŠKODOVÁ and her poster; 6 – Congress dinner; 7 – Congress venue; 8 – the youngest participant.
Photos: B. M. POKRYSZKO

the world's malacology. What is not shown in the graph is that: 1. nearly 50% of the presentations included in the count had some molecular aspect to them; 2. very many conservation papers dealt with bivalves; 3. using modelling in order to predict habitats and/or distributions of molluscs is getting increasingly popular, and 4. studying and presenting anatomical structures using threeD technology is doing the same.

The general and very distinct scientific tendencies are: the come-back of phylogeny and systematics, but now using an array of methods, including molecular analysis; joining forces for conservation purposes; improving quality of fossil studies most of which now consider a variety of factors of past environments and use reliable dating techniques. The technological tendencies lean toward threeD and mathematical modelling.

During the Dinner prizes were given for the best student posters and presentations. In fact all the presentations of the young malacologists were good, and we think everybody deserved a prize.

The presentations and posters are more sophisticated and more graphically beautiful at each consecutive Congress (I have seen 11 Congresses). A word of warning, though: some posters and slides are so sophisticated that it takes a long time to grasp their meaning.

The Congress started with the Ice Breaker (wine and snacks in a nice restaurant) and ended with the

Congress Dinner in a very posh restaurant. Besides molluscs, malacologists like their food and drink, so everybody enjoyed both events. Apart from the two culinary occasions, we were given lunch tickets for every day of the Congress; during the coffee breaks we were offered not only coffee (or tea, or juices) but also cookies and tiny little pastries stuffed with cheese, meat and other interesting ingredients. All were delicious. There were also drinks at the poster session. All the lunches, snacks and drinks, I suspect, were meant to keep us from wandering away from the sessions in search of food and drink.

The Congress excursion went to the most attractive places on Sao Miguel to see, among other things, manifestations of volcanic activity and to eat a special geothermally cooked Azorean meal. Many people went on individual trips, mainly to see and/or collect molluscs.

The next Congress (2016) will be held in a very exotic place...

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