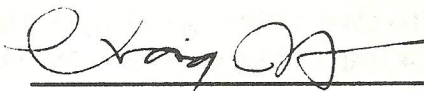


WORLD CONGRESS OF HERPETOLOGY

NEWSLETTER No. 3

10 July 1985

This newsletter serves a dual function: to provide a means of communication among the Executive Committee (EC) and the International Herpetological Committee (IHC) and, at the same time, be a status report to those organizations and individuals who have decided officially to support the Congress. Since this is an international effort, I encourage comment from all persons who receive this newsletter, so that I can become better aware of the diversity of concerns and opinions.


Kraig Adler

1. Choice of Congress Site and Date: Canterbury 1989.

Following two rounds of communications with the EC and the IHC, the criteria were established for selection of a congress venue and date, and the nominated sites were reduced from nearly 50 to a final 5 (Barcelona, Canterbury, Florence, Prague, and Vienna). In November 1984 I wrote to colleagues in each site to ask for official invitations. Vienna was not able to offer an invitation, but detailed proposals were submitted by the others. In March 1985 the EC voted and, by a very small margin, decided to hold the congress at the University of Kent at Canterbury, United Kingdom. The proposals were excellent ones, each having its own advantages, and the selection was therefore highly competitive.

Following the vote I visited Canterbury twice, once with Michael Lambert, member of the EC. Canterbury is one of the ancient cities of England, with its great cathedral and picturesque old town surrounded by a Norman fortress wall. The city is a leading tourist site and strategically located southeast of London yet just across the channel from France and the European continent. Location near London gives access to the world's first and fourth busiest international airports (Heathrow, Gatwick), thus providing many connections and competitive airfares. Canterbury is easily reached from London by regular train and coach service, and from the continent by numerous automobile ferries.

The university is separate, on a quiet hill overlooking the city. The facilities are excellent, both in terms of meeting rooms and eating/sleeping quarters. The University of Kent routinely hosts large congresses and the conference officials we met were quite knowledgeable. The local organizer will be Ian Swingland, a well-known reptile ecologist.

I am also happy to report that there is a widespread desire among the British herpetological community to provide active support for the Canterbury meeting. This will be essential to the success of the congress. In particular, the Earl of Cranbrook, a leading naturalist and currently President of The British Herpetological Society, has shown great interest. In the two meetings I held with him after the EC vote, Lord Cranbrook expressed a willingness to help with some of the major arrangements.

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We propose to hold the congress in September (possibly August) 1989. This being the first congress, we need time to carefully plan all aspects. I am currently negotiating a contract with the university and expect to finalize it by late 1985. If by some unforeseen circumstance it is not possible to develop a satisfactory contract, then I will shift to Florence which was a close second in the voting. Announcement of the official site and final dates will be placed in leading journals, as we have done with our notices in the past.

The meeting will be open to all persons who wish to attend. I anticipate that 600 to 800 people will attend, hopefully including many younger colleagues and students, and representatives from all countries in the world having herpetological research activity.

2. Format of the Congress.

Our first congress will set important precedents for later ones so we must plan it especially carefully. Since we are not bound by tradition we should try new approaches wherever they seem worth attempting. In designing our meeting, I think we need to be guided by certain goals. It seems obvious that one goal should be to maximize contact and exchange of information among participants. An international congress also ought to be the place to review herpetology as a world-wide discipline, to discuss its current status and also the most important prospects for future research.

Doubtless there will be many views on how to accomplish these and other worthy goals. This newsletter now reaches over 100 persons. Therefore, rather than asking each of you to propose a format, I have decided to do so myself, simply to provide a starting point for discussion. I will then ask for your comments on it and any further ideas that you might have.

3. Dates of Meeting.

September seems better than August, primarily because airfares are lower after the prime tourist season ends.

I believe that we should begin and end the congress on weekdays, in order to avoid the higher airfares and reduced schedules that exist on weekends. For example, we could arrive on a Tuesday, begin officially early on Wednesday, take a break on Saturday for an all-day group excursion, have a reduced meeting on Sunday, and finish with a final full day on Monday before departing Tuesday.

4. Main Program.

I propose that we have no oral contributed papers. This may seem radical, but I think there are compelling reasons. Oral papers can be replaced by posters, and oral sessions would be devoted to a series of plenary or keynote lectures plus several topical symposia. The main purpose at the congress ought to be an overview of our field (plenary lectures) and in-depth coverage of the most important current topics (symposia). To provide the time necessary to do this, contributed papers would have to be given as posters.

In many ways posters are the preferable way to communicate research information. They allow authors to give more detailed data; and interested persons can talk personally with the author and at length. This is more conducive to a productive exchange of information. Posters would be listed in the program as papers and authors would be present near their poster at the times announced in the program to talk with other persons.

The plenary lectures would be given on the first day of the congress. Everyone would be present for these lectures and thus provide a good opportunity to get acquainted with other participants during intermission periods. The 6 to 10 lectures would be 30- to 60-minute in-depth presentations of major topics, collectively covering the entire spectrum of herpetology. The lecturers would be the world's experts on their topics, chosen by the EC and IHC for their preeminence and speaking ability.

Two symposia would be held simultaneously on all other days of the meeting. Each symposium would last a single day, so that 6 to 8 topics could be covered during the meeting. Topics would be chosen from suggestions made by the EC and IHC. A list of the topics and organizers would be published so that potential participants could volunteer, although final selection would be left to the symposium organizers in consultation with the EC.

5. Activities During Meals and Evenings.

To maximize contact among participants, special rooms would be listed in the program where interested people could assemble to meet and discuss designated topics (e.g., Bufonidae, predator-prey interactions, molecular techniques, etc.) during meal times.

During the evenings there would be get-acquainted socials with an open bar and live music, and audio-visual programs (slide shows, motion picture sessions). Midway through the week we could have a special speaker one evening on a topic of general biological or natural history interest, intended for all persons including families.

6. Workshops and Displays.

To provide an alternate format for other kinds of programs we would sponsor various kinds of workshops and displays (e.g., how-to-do-it photographic sessions, laboratory techniques, displays of books, etc.). Commercial sponsors would pay fees that could be used to reduce the overall cost of the meeting.

7. Excursions.

Excursions would be of two types. Partial- and full-day trips would be scheduled throughout the meeting, mainly for families: to London for shopping or sightseeing, and tours of interesting sites nearby (e.g., Charles Darwin's home) or across the channel into northern France. An all-day trip to London would be planned for everyone, probably on Saturday. We could visit the Natural History Museum and the London Zoo as well as major tourist sites. This would serve as a needed break in pace midway through the week.

8. Congress Language.

There is the inevitable question of whether the congress ought to have many official languages or only a single one for presentations. There are persuasive arguments on both sides of this issue, but if the primary goal of a congress is to maximize communication and exchange of ideas among all participants, then a single language is to be preferred. On the other hand, many countries will not support a person's travel expenses unless their presentation is in the native language and we must take this point into consideration.

I propose that English be the official language but that other languages be permitted. No cultural preference is hereby implied. The only consideration is choice of a convenient tool for communication, and English would seem to be the most universally used language (either primary or secondary) by a majority of the participants. It would be difficult to have facilities for simultaneous translation because of cost. We might do so, however, if there is strong demand. Even then the congress probably could not afford to hire translators and speakers would have to provide their own.

9. Travel Grants.

It would be nice to suppose that we could offer travel grants but our funds presently are very limited. We need ideas for raising large sums for this purpose. If we can do so, then I recommend that first priority be given to persons participating in symposia or other official functions and who have the least opportunity to obtain other funding.

10. Business Meeting.

We should keep bureaucracy to a minimum, but we must elect new officers, vote on a Constitution (which we shall begin to draft soon) and discuss frequency of congresses and other essential matters.

11. Publications.

We will, of course, have an official program including abstracts of all papers (plenary lectures, symposia, posters). Advertisement space in the program can be sold—except to live animal dealers, I would recommend—to support congress costs. Copies of the program, which would nicely cover current research in the entire field of herpetology, could be sold world-wide to raise additional funds for the present or future congresses.

I do not propose that we publish the proceedings of our congress. The congress, I think, should not become a publishing organization, with its attendant financial commitments and risks as well as storage and mailing

problems. Besides, publishers exist for symposia if publication can be justified. When I visited Leiden in February to discuss congress matters, Marinus Hoogmoed and I met with the president of E. J. Brill, the well-known academic publisher. Brill would be keenly interested in publishing some symposia. In addition, the plenary lectures could be offered as a collected work entitled "Advances in Herpetology." No commitments were made, but there is clear interest in publishing portions of our congress activities.

REQUEST FOR ADVICE

Now that I have briefly outlined a possible plan, I need to have your comments and criticisms. Do not restrict yourself to the issues I have listed above. Doubtless there are many good ideas that we ought to consider and perhaps implement.

Please send me your response no later than 15 September 1985. It would help me to consolidate all the replies if you could use my numbering system. As before, your comments will be kept confidential and not identified as to source. If there is general agreement on the main points, I will proceed to work with the EC and with Dr. Swingland and the authorities at the University of Kent. If there is substantial disagreement, however, I will circulate another, revised proposal. Thank you in advance for your comments.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Ideally it is always best to discuss these matters in face-to-face meetings since correspondence takes so much longer. Thus, I wish to take advantage of two upcoming meetings to informally discuss several key questions with members of the EC and IHC and all others who receive this newsletter.

Many of you will be attending the Societas Europaea Herpetologica meeting in Prague, Czechoslovakia next month. I suggest that we meet to discuss plans for the congress at that time. The most convenient opportunity to meet seems to be immediately following the concert on Tuesday, 20 August. Dr. Roček has kindly arranged a room for us: the "Klub" room, located on the first floor off the main lobby in "Kajetánka," the university dormitory where most of us will be staying. We expect people to return from the concert about 10:30 PM, and will begin our meeting shortly thereafter. We will meet for no more than an hour. I do hope that you will join us.

In addition, after Prague I will attend the Sino-Japanese Herpetological Symposium in Guangzhou, China. Although I have not arranged a special meeting for us at that symposium, I hope to confer with some of you in Guangzhou.

I feel that we have made significant progress recently in planning our congress and I look forward eagerly to the public announcements. I appreciate very much your cooperation and support.

Best wishes.