

Report on an Extraordinary General Business Meeting of Societas Europaea Herpetologica held during the 9th OGM Scientific Conference at Savoie Technolac (Université de Savoie), Le Bourget du Lac (Chambéry), France, 28 August 1998

Discussion on an additional function of Societas Europaea Herpetologica as an umbrella-organisation for national/linguistic societies and associations in Europe. Reference was made to the proposal by Wolfgang Böhme (President), with suggestions on its possible implementation by Michael Lambert, printed in SEH News [Amphibia-Reptilia 19(2): 235-238, May 1998]. Lengthy discussion on the proposal was contributed to by both members of SEH and non-members attending the meeting. Three main points came out of the discussion.

1. Pan-European coordination of herpetological activities should not be conducted under the name "SEH umbrella-organisation". SEH should not elevated itself above other societies in Europe. Coordination of activities needs to operate on a "horizontal" level, not a hierarchical or "vertical" one. Ecology and environmental considerations are now to the fore, and, since its foundation by traditional taxonomists in museums who historically in Europe have made up the majority of professional herpetologists, the Society needs to change with these requirements of modern times in relation to the direction being taken for research funding in the future. Although requiring structural changes (SEH News, May 1998), becoming a pan-European umbrella-organisation would be one way of doing so.

Another problem is that many of the national/linguistic societies in Europe have memberships made up of 90% or more of amateurs with interests purely in keeping species in vivaria. Laboratory husbandry of experimental animals was one professional aspect of vivarium-keeping in the context of captive breeding. SEH, with a student subscription rate, also had the potential to cater for students and other young herpetologists, especially in an educational context. A recruitment drive among young people was required, also in order to perpetuate the Society's interests in future. It was also agreed that SEH needed to increase its size because of the costs of the journal.

2. A newsletter was earnestly required for announcements of all congresses/meetings of multinational and national/linguistic herpetological societies in Europe. Amphibia-Reptilia catered specifically for the needs of researchers. With a newsletter produced as an inexpensive item, SEH was in a position to serve the interests of all herpetologists in Europe, whether professional or amateur. In the context of a newsletter, herpetologists in Britain had the potential to make a substantial contribution to herpetology on a pan-European level since SEH also has English as its working language.

3. SEH's website could be developed further and improve communication between herpetologists, and in particular students, in the context of a pan-European network in herpetology. SEH membership would be publicised, conference programmes announced, and there would be general publicity about SEH publications for sale. In conclusion, it agreed that there was a need for a pan-European network in herpetology with short meeting announcements and the opportunity for captive breeding exchanges. If the title SEH "umbrella-organisation" did not find universal acceptance, perhaps the name of SEH "Pan-European Herpetological Network" would find greater appeal. This suggestion was put to an indicative vote: for, 23; against, 0; abstentions, 7. With this approval, an appeal was made for volunteers to develop the Network. The names of N. Vogrin (Vransko), Katya Paboljsaj (Ljubljana), R. Tramontano (Lund), D. Schmeller (Mainz), M. Burgren (...? town...), E. Razzetti (Milano) and C. Miaud (Le Bourget du Lac) were offered at the meeting.

Michael Lambert (General Secretary)