

SEH News

11th Ordinary General Meeting of SEH

The following reports will be discussed at the 11th Ordinary General Business Meeting of SEH at Žalec, Slovenia, Sunday, 15 July 2001 (afternoon).

Report of the General Secretary 1999/2000

This report outlines the activities of the Society for the period 1 January 1999 to 31 December 2000, and follows the precedent established at the last Ordinary General Business Meeting (OGBM) in Irakleio (Crete), September 1999 [see SEH News in *Amphibia-Reptilia* **20**(2), May 1999]. As always, I want firstly to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues on SEH Council. Their cooperation, support and input have been invaluable during the last two years, and indeed I have come to depend, and lean on them quite heavily for their contributions. It would be invidious to mention names, but all of the members of Council have assisted with the Society's development in different ways. I also continue to try and strengthen the Society's influence in environmental issues generally, and herpetofaunal conservation in particular.

In a conservation context, I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the Society to congratulate Keith Corbett, Chair of SEH's Conservation Committee, who received the honour of MBE (Member, Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's New Year Honours List (1 January 2001) recommended by the British Government for services to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles.

Now in the Society's third decade since being founded in Bonn (Statutes dated 11 September 1979), membership on 31 December 2000 stood at 427 from 40 countries. This is again a slight decrease since the 451 from 43 countries (31 December 1998) in my report for the 10th OGBM in Irakleio (Crete). It is proving unearthly difficult to reverse the apparent downward trend, and get the membership on the increase again — to reach the magical figure of 500! On the other hand, independent institutional and individual subscriptions for the journal made direct to the publisher, Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden — have increased, and the higher payment rates than the membership fee benefit societal membership as a whole, since they ensure Amphibia-Reptilia's commercial viability and thereby assist in keeping the members' subscription rate down and stable! However, members need to bear in mind that the implication of the EUR 60 subscription voted-for at the 10th OGBM (as against the alternative proposal of EUR 75) was that SEH should not spend money on any activity other than publication of the journal. No surplus has thus been made available, and greater development of other Societal activities must therefore depend on external funding sources, which must be actively sought by someone with experience in financial management.

European-based members total 316 members (74% of the membership), with those in Germany making-up 24% of the membership. North American-based members represent 18% of the membership (this is a slight increase from 16% on 31 December 1998), and elsewhere 8%.

Since the 10th OGBM in Irakleio (Crete), SEH Council has met on three occasions: at the end of the Irakleio meeting in September 1999; in April 2000 at Ljubljana/Žalec, and in October 2000 at Budapest. Effort is being made to reduce the number of Council meetings, which members often have difficulty in attending, and to increase communication by e-mail.

The period since the last OGM in September 1999 has been more one of consolidation since the frenzy of proposals in 1997 and societal development during the previous two-year period [see the General Secretary's 1998/99 report in SEH News, *Amphibia-Reptilia* **20**(2), May 1999], which in effect constituted a Societal watershed. Main subjects for discussion on meeting agendas have addressed:

- *Arrangements for the 11th OGM [to be held at Žalec (near Celje), Slovenia, 13-17 July 2001]*. An invitation from Nuša Vogrin (on behalf of Environmental Society Radoživ, Žalec, in cooperation with the University of Maribor) was accepted.
- *Development of the Pan-European Herpetological Network (P-EHN)*: Nuša Vogrin (Hadjina) is presently co-ordinator of the Network. A progress report will be made separately on this (see item 16 on the 11th OGBM agenda).
- *Development of the SEH web site on <http://www.gli.cas.cz/SEH/>, especially in the context of developing P-EHN*: Edoardo Razzetti (Pavia) is the new webmaster, and is reporting separately on this (see item 17 on the 11th OGBM agenda).
- *Arrangements concerning Amphibia-Reptilia. Progressing the formal agreement with the journal's publisher, Brill Academic Publishers (Leiden)*.

I have represented the Society and promoted membership at three national/international herpetological meetings during 2000: the American joint herpetological and ichthyological societies' meeting at La Paz, Baja California (Mexico), 14-20 June; the 4th Asian Herpetological Conference at Chengdu (Sichuan, China), 16-20 July, and the 3rd National Congress of Societas Herpetologica Italica at Pavia (Lombardia, Italy), 14-16 September.

Finally, five candidates had to be identified, and nominated to replace three Council members not eligible for re-election, one not wishing to stand for re-election and a vacancy. Except for the post of Treasurer, Council nominations, and curricula vitae for the candidates, have already been circulated with the agenda for the 11th OGBM (item 12) printed in SEH News [*Amphibia-Reptilia* **22**(1), February 2001].

A replacement Treasurer/financial manager for the Society is still earnestly sought. Members are invited to offer their names for this important function on behalf of the Society, and indeed for pan-European herpetology, which the Society represents. The candidate needs to be a German citizen, who, apart from being able to liaise in German with the Society's bankers, would also act as *Geschäftsführer* for the Finanzamt in Bonn [in relation to the Society's listing (20 May 1980) with the Vereinsregister (as VR 4492) of the Amtsgericht — Registergericht, Bonn].

Michael R.K. Lambert

Chatham, 15 February 2001

Report of the Co-Editors 1999/2000

This report was included with SEH News in *Amphibia-Reptilia* **22**(1), February 2001.

Provisional report of the Treasurer 1999/2000

This provisional report covers the period from 1 January 1999 to 31 December 2000, and will be examined together with the books and vouchers by the Auditors before the Business Meeting of the 11th Ordinary General Meeting at Žalec (Slovenia), 13-17 July 2001. The last financial report, dated 31 December 1998, was presented in Irakleio (Crete) on 9 September 1999. It closed with a positive balance of EUR 23,712.15 (DEM 46,376.22). A summary of the accounts in EUR is given below.

Income:

<i>Membership fees</i>	1.01.-31.12.1999	13,971.41	
	1.01.-31.12.2000	26,060.48	40,031.89
<i>Donation for Conservation Committee</i>	1999	697.92	
	2000	1,166.88	1,864.80
<i>Income from bank interests</i>	1999	401.68	
	2000	191.22	592.90
<i>Donations to SHE</i>	1999	64.94	
	2000	75.00	139.94
<i>Profit from currency exchanges</i>	1999	193.03	
	2000	461.24	654.27
<i>Charges for late payment</i>	1999	168.73	
	2000	143.00	311.73

Additional income:

1999	Sale of Proceedings Prague 1985 (one)		41.85
	Sales of Proceedings Bonn 1995 (four)		135.49
	Members' payment for postal cheque charges		3.07
2000	Sales of Proceedings volumes		43.97
	Members' payment for credit card charges		461.70
	Repayment of unwarranted bank charges by the German Postbank		109.42
	Reimbursement of the extra cost for tax, customs duties etc. for SEH by the credit card agency (GZS)		127.83
	Reimbursement of extra labour for the Treasurer by the credit card agency (GZS)		127.82
	Transfer from bank account to postal giro account		872.38
			<hr/>
			45,519.06

Expenses:

<i>Share of printing costs</i>	1999	16,934.26	
	2000	18,775.05	35,709.31
<i>Office requisites: photocopies</i>	1999	9.86	
	2000	89.40	99.26
<i>Postage</i>	1999	79.43	
	2000	616.62	696.05
<i>Telephone, telefax</i>	1999	6.44	
	2000	59.45	65.89
<i>Credit card charges</i>	1999	–	
	2000	554.17	554.17
<i>Postal charges: account, cheques</i>	1999	101.80	
	2000	265.56	367.36
<i>Payment to Conservation Committee for 1998 and 1999</i>	1999	–	
	2000	1,620.79	1,620.79
<i>1998 membership dues for IUCN</i>	1999	213.57	
	2000	220.91	434.48
<i>Loss from currency exchanges</i>	1999	7.20	
	2000	3.14	10.34

Additional expenses:

2000	Reimbursement of travel expenses for audit in Basel on 1 September 1999		19.94
	Customs duties for credit card printer		13.77
	Transfer from bank account to postal giro account		872.38
			<hr/>
			40,463.74

Final clearing:

Balance brought forward from	31.xii.1998	23,712.16	
Income	1.i.1999-31.xii.2000	45,519.06	
Expenses	1.i.1999-31.xii.2000		40,463.74
		69,231.22	<u>40,463.74</u>
			28,767.48
		69,231.22	<u>69,231.22</u>

The balance of EUR 28,767.48 is covered by the following account assets:

bank savings account	14,386.52
postal giro account	<u>14,380.96</u>
	28,767.48

G. Heinrich Thommen

Basel, 12 February 2001

Report of the Conservation Committee 1999/2000

A list of Committee members is included with SEH's webpage, together with the list of species covered by the 1979 Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife (Appendix II: "Strictly Protected Fauna Species") and 1992 European Union Habitats and Species Directive (Appendix IV: "Animal and Plant Species of Community Interest in Need of Strict Protection").

As predicted, our meetings have had to be reduced to one per year and, where possible, with a degree of subsidy from the host country. Accordingly, we met in Salamanca (Spain) in Spring 1999, and in Rüdeshheim (Germany) in Spring 2000.

As forewarned at the Prague and Irakleio (Crete) OGBMs, our declining resources have now virtually brought an end to our important 'Habitat Assessment' work on the more endangered of the European herpetofaunal taxa. The Salamanca deliberations were therefore largely focussed on internal soul searching and future strategy, with our main conclusion being the need for new and younger blood. A chicken-and-egg scenario then comes into play in that we need any future aspirants to have some practical conservation experience and also a sufficient degree of independent funding; this latter constraint is unnecessarily elitist, impractical, and a potential barrier, especially for those from Eastern European countries in economic transition.

The Rüdeshheim meeting was more constructive in that its main purposes were:

a) to assess the state of implementation of the many elements of the nineteen Bern Convention Recommendations addressing conservation of herpetofauna, and to advise the Bern Bureau of our considered priorities; and

b) to assist the German and Hessen State governments in the conservation of *Podarcis muralis* in the once optimum vineyard habitats of the Rheingau, and particularly those above Rüdeshheim.

We were represented, as usual, at the annual Standing Committees of the Bern Convention. In 2000 this at last re-addressed the mounting problems of the Mediterranean's *Chelonia mydas* populations and that of *Macrovipera schweizeri* on Milos. Unfortunately, the whole proceedings were rather overshadowed by the announcement of a 40% budgetary cut to the Convention from the Council of Europe! Members of SEH might like to question their national Environment Ministry on how this was justified, and more importantly on how they plan to achieve a reversal?

While *Chelonia mydas* populations and their habitats remain under serious threat in Turkey and Cyprus; their fate may now be at terminal risk from the loss of their sea grass beds by the unchecked and rapid eastward spread of an alien and aberrant marine alga.

Macrovipera schweizeri remains threatened by the pre-occupation of the Greek Government to sell-off the mineral rights in its prime remaining habitats on Milos, and refusal to supply Bern with details of current permissions. Directly related to this situation, SEH CC. lodged a formal complaint to the EU for the alleged

breach of Habitat and Species Directive requirements for this species by the failure of Greece to designate the appropriate Natura 2000 area(s).

Despite many conservation measures on paper, the on-site status of Hungary's *Vipera ursinii rakosiensis* population continues to decline. If taken seriously, recent "academic" proposals, based on a reported lack of genetic variation, now threaten to intervene, and remove this endangered taxon from the wild "for its own good"!

Despite the 1998 on-the-spot Appraisal to advise the Turkish government on boundary options for the proposed herpetofaunal-assembly Nature Reserve at Hopa, no subsequent progress has yet been reported.

On a more positive note, our participation (financed by the Herpetological Conservation Trust) in European Habitats Forum (EHF) meetings has enabled our specialist advice to be channelled to relevant Biogeographical seminars concerned with national Natura 2000 proposals. At the same time, I am very pleased to report that EHF's regular meetings with the EU's DG.XI staff has improved relations and mutual understanding in herpetofaunal matters.

Donning hats for the IUCN SSC Group for European Herpetofauna, progress with the last stages of the draft text of our Action Plans seems ever slower. The main problem lies with the increased work pressures on those charged with the editing role; however it is anticipated that the final draft will be submitted by Summer 2001.

Closely associated with the Action Plans and our input to the Bern Convention, we may be assisting in a two-year project to identify Important Herpetofaunal Areas (IHAs.) for Europe, and which it is hoped would link with the existing IBAs for birds and those currently underway for Plants and Butterflies, i.e. IPAs and PBAs. Their eventual implementation and co-ordination could greatly assist with achievement of true biodiversity conservation in Europe.

Returning briefly to our financial problems and the need for new, younger members, we are reluctantly led to draw comparisons with the SEH's situation with Amphibia-Reptilia. A sound scientific journal yes, but can its disproportionate costs be justified? Can it help to attract young European herpetologists to SEH with an ever decreasing European content, and one which rarely covers conservation? This might be a suitable and timely topic to explore at the 11th OGBM in Žalec, and the balance redressed with encouragement for sound papers on a solid European conservation theme to be submitted for publication in Amphibia-Reptilia.

Keith Corbett

Bournemouth, 13 February 2001

Report of the Mapping Committee 1999/2000

This is a report on the mapping committee meeting convened during the 10th OGM in Irakleio (Crete), together with various suggestions put forward during the meeting. Regrettably, this report was delayed through the very sad death of Hervé Maurin, head of the Service du Patrimoine Naturel (SPN), after a prolonged illness. It was he who initiated an inventory of Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe and, together with his team, had co-ordinated the inventorying and data processing of all the maps, and finally was responsible for publication of the Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe (1997). He is listed among its editors. His loss resulted in SPN temporarily being unable maintain its participation in the inventory of Amphibians and Reptiles in the Western Palearctic. This project now, however, has the support of the new Department head, Mme Geneviève Humbert. Furthermore, the supervising authority, the Ministère de l'Aménagement du Territoire et de l'Environnement, has just agreed to take charge of the new project, at least during the launching stage.

Objectives of the new atlas: To improve on the current atlas with corrections, up-date it with new information (placing new points on the maps, or removing others where populations have become extinct since 1997), and adding new areas so that the whole of the Western Palearctic area is covered.

Duration of the inventory: Inventorying could cover the 2000-2005 period if it is accepted that the year 2000 is not too far advanced already. The last year (2005) will be devoted to final data processing and verification of all distribution maps.

Period covered by the atlas: Records for the 35-year period 1970 to 2004.

Geographical boundaries: Europe east to the Ural Mountains and the Caspian Sea (western shore), Turkish borders with Iran and Iraq, Syrian border with Iraq, Jordanian borders with Iraq and Saudi Arabia, western shore of the Red Sea, latitude 25° south, longitude 35° west. The Canary Islands, Madeira, and the Azores are therefore included; the Cape Verde Islands are not.

Countries involved: A total of 58 countries are either completely (T) or only partly covered (P). Twelve new countries will be included — these countries are underlined (see list below). Azerbaijan, Greece and Turkey, which were only partly covered in the 1997 Atlas, are now wholly included. Likewise for Spain and Portugal, the Canary Islands, Madeira and the Azores are included. Iceland is also part of the study area, and is listed here notwithstanding that there are no amphibians or reptiles there:

Albania (T), Algeria (P), Andorra (T), Armenia (T), Austria (T), Azerbaijan (T), Belgium (T), Bosnia Herzegovina (T), Bulgaria (T), Byelorussia (T), Croatia (T), Cyprus (T), Czech Republic (T), Denmark (T), Egypt (P), Estonia (T), Finland (T), France (T), Georgia (T), Germany (T), Greece (T), Hungary (T), Iceland (T), Ireland (T), Israel (T), Italy (T), Jordan (T), Kazakhstan (P), Latvia (T), Lebanon (T), Libya (P), Liechtenstein (T), Lithuania (T), Luxembourg (T), Macedonia (T), Malta (T), Moldavia (T), Monaco (T), Morocco (P), Netherlands (The)(T), Norway (T), Poland (T), Portugal (T), Romania (T), Russian Federation (P), San Marino (T), Slovakia (T), Slovenia (T), Spain (T), Sweden (T), Switzerland (T), Syria (T), Tunisia (T), Turkey (T), Ukraine (T), United Kingdom (T), Vatican (T), Yugoslavia (T)

Data to be collected: species; country; period; list of 50 km × 50 km UTM meshes where the species was sighted between 1970 and 2004.

Data collection: It is proposed that there should be one correspondent designated for each country and he/she will be responsible for synthesising data and transferring them to the Service du Patrimoine Naturel (Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris). This correspondent will also be responsible for ensuring that analysis of all papers for species found in the country is undertaken, and updating the list of bibliographic references. He/she can select one or more collaborators to assist in this work. A list already exists for the European part of the area covered by the new inventory, but it will have to be updated. As for the other countries, lists will have to be worked out. Correspondents will also have to be found for the newly independent States. In some cases, the same person can be correspondent for more than one country.

Data can be transformed in several ways:

- Using forms showing the country's boundaries and a 50 km × 50 km UTM grid. One specimen would be drawn for each country (except for small countries covering less than two grids, or included in another country). These forms would be drawn-up on the same model as those used for the inventory of Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe. The existing maps would be updated for new state boundaries and their content improved.
- Transferring existing computer files used for a local atlas. Distribution atlases are becoming increasingly common. Computerised databases are built to store information, in which case it will not be necessary to synthesise and transfer data onto a form. The SPN is equipped with all the tools needed to convert most systems into UTM co-ordinates and to fill corresponding 50 km × 50 km UTM grids. When data are stored in a special system of geographic co-ordinates (specific to one country), a description of the system's characteristics should suffice for computer scientists to be able to work out a conversion procedure. Data transfer procedures to the SPN would have to be worked out specifically for each database. However, the SPN could supply the list of those fields that will have to be filled. If the database is not already built up, the SPN will supply a framework for data entries (probably an EXCEL file).
- Using forms to collect data in degrees or in UTM co-ordinates. Use of a GPS is becoming common. For those equipped with GPS, but not in a position to computerise data, it would be possible to devise a card system specifically adapted to receive data GPS-pinpointed. There would be no need for the observer to find the 50 km × 50 km UTM grid, as required when filling the grid for countries. In any case, a copy of all data directly transferred to the SPN will be sent to the correspondents of the countries concerned.

List of species: All species found in at least one grid of the area covered by this inventory will be taken into account. Various African or Asian species will therefore be treated. An initial list is being drawn up. It will be augmented as work goes along and discoveries are made. The systematics will also be updated throughout the duration of the inventory. Whenever possible, the distribution maps will include these alterations in systematics (provided there is no confusion when data are redistributed).

Mapping Committee: This is made up of one Committee head, one SPN agent (technical assistance), and one representative per country who will normally be the person in charge of data collection in that country (the correspondent). These representatives should preferably be seasoned herpetologists native to the country concerned. Failing this, they will be foreigners with specialist knowledge of the specific country. It is highly

desirable that they be members of the SEH but this is not compulsory for non-European countries. A deputy will be designated for each country in case the incumbent becomes unavailable.

An initial list will be put forward by the Editorial Committee of the Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe which will thus be the founding core of the new Mapping Committee. This list will have to be augmented and amended, each country being responsible for suggesting new names. Should a dispute arise, the Editorial Committee of the Atlas of Amphibians and Reptiles in Europe could be called in for arbitration.

Meetings (two a year) could be called using preferably some kind of electronic communication system, except when organised during the various SEH conferences. However, a small committee made up of those in charge of the various sectors, and whose names would have to be decided upon, could convene yearly in Paris.

Schedule: 2004 — editors will be selected and work will start on writing the monographs. 2005 — final work on monographs, rereading them and checking them against the final maps. 2006 — editing and publication of the Atlas.

Jean-Pierre Gasc (and Patrick Haffner)

Paris, 14 November 2000