

A CALL FOR A NEW INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF ZOOLOGY

We are looking for response concerning the feasibility of a New International Congress of Zoology, possibly to be convened in Athens, sometime during 1999 or 2000.

The First International Congress of Zoology was held in Paris, in 1889. Seventy years later, the XVIth Congress in Washington recommended the discontinuation of the congresses because of the feeling that Zoology has split into too many unrelated specialized fields. Nonetheless a last XVIIth rump Congress was held in 1972 in Monte Carlo. The relatively few participants of this meeting unanimously, but in vain, asked for the continuation of the Congress. The idea was advanced that the International Conferences on Systematic and Evolutionary Biology will replace the defunct Zoological Congresses at a higher integrative level. After several meetings of the ICSEB, it became evident that they did not live-up to this expectation. To this contributed also the asymmetry that the International Congresses of Botany continued undisturbed and successfully to this very days.

One of the unhappy consequences of the cessation has been the fact that the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature, once accountable to the Congresses, came under the formal responsibility of the General Congresses of International Union of the Biological Sciences (IUBS). But the more painful and long-lasting consequence was a general depreciation of Zoology in the academic world as such, and the replacement of this discipline by a plethora of euphemistically more fashionable designations.

However Zoology at the end of this century is more alive than ever and rich in new ideas and achievements. A multispeciality exchange of views is more necessary than ever before. Not unexpectedly, this is also the consequence of the extreme parochialism of the different splinter fields and the ignorance of general zoological issues which it generated. There is a long list of such issues which cut across the lines of all the zoological specialties, some of them of important philosophical and practical significance.

The widely circulated "Systematics Agenda 2000" emphasizes our present incapacity to scientifically describe a zoological biodiversity which suddenly appears to be one order of magnitude larger than envisaged back in the 1970's. This is not only a matter of quantities or of time needed, but a matter which calls for the restructuration of the zoological research world over. A critically depleted and weakened community of zoological systematics cannot live up to the task to investigate and possibly protect the heritage of the animal world.

On the positive side, there are many developments of the last three decades which need to be appreciated by an international forum of all the zoologists. Confined to the pages of strictly specialized journals, these important developments often did not reach the attention of the peers in other zoological specialties. In the field of more classical Zoology, it would be useful to acquaint our colleagues with the lately discovered new animal phyla and classes, the new concepts of vertebrate evolution, the zoology of clonal animals, the present view on the Protozoa, etc. A sample of subjects of wider implications are sociobiology, cladistics, molecular taxonomy, modern embryology, the new vision on the Cambrian revolution, the neo-catastrophism, vicariance zoogeography, in situ and "ex situ" conservation, cryopreservation and cloning etc. This is a different Zoology from that which ended with a whimper in Monte Carlo.

We are ready to try to bring forward again the rich and unifying aspects of Zoology and to reassert its general global, human and philosophical role. We are hoping for the approval and support of the zoological diaspora. The best encouragement will be to send us suggestions regarding the themes and the structure of the proposed New International Congress of Zoology. More important again, we need personal commitments to help organizing symposia, workshops and hints of possible funding sources. We shall need even at an early stage, to establish an active and representative Action Committee. Understandably, we shall be able to appeal for funding only after having obtained convincing public support and after having a prestigious enough Committee in place.

Dr. F.D. Por
Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Department of Evolution,
Systematics and Ecology
POB 91904

Dr. R.M. Polymeni
University of Athens
Department of Biology
Section of Zoology
POB 15784