doing well compared to other journals, with subscriptions increasing. She stressed that members should ensure their libraries register their IP numbers with the press if they are taking the journal. The Impact Factor of the journal is increasing over the years. The finances are sound and this is the first year in which the Society will receive income from the journal, increasing in later years. Online submission is planned for 2003.

Ron Ydenberg gave the Editors’ report. Submissions are increasing, with 639 since the last report, which is 71 per editor per year. 182 were accepted and 371 rejected (the others are still in handling), giving a 33% acceptance rate. 1314 reviews from 853 referees were handled. The lay summaries are working well. The blinded reviewing procedure is also working well, even though there are some complaints, but Ron commented that reviewers are not as good as they think about identifying authors. Ron Ydenberg and Innes Cuthill have come to the ends of their terms and are being replaced by Ian Owens and Marlene Zuk. There will be a change in the organizational structure of the journal editing when electronic submission is introduced.

Walt Koenig gave the Treasurer's report. The Society is in good shape, especially as it has become a tax-exempt organization in the USA. The main income comes from the journal, money in the bank and (sometimes) (small) profits from the meetings. The main expense is the Newsletter. The Society committee decided to help participants from disadvantaged countries attend its next meeting.

Ken Otter gave the Newsletter report. The book reviews are a success. He intends to publish workshop proceedings, especially where no published proceedings are planned. He is also interested in receiving commentary pieces, especially from students. Cartoonist wanted! Send him stuff - it might well get in. There is a website at web.unbc.ca/isbe.


Steve Emlen, Marion Petrie, Jane Brockmann and Andre Dhondt have completed their terms as Past President, Secretary and committee members. They are replaced by Nick Davies, Paul Ward, Hanna Kokko and Nina Wedell respectively. Jack Bradbury joins the committee as President Elect. Malte Andersson thanked all the outgoing officers and welcomed the new ones.

Malte Andersson closed the meeting to uproarious applause.

Paul Ward, ISBE Secretary

SWEET CANADA, CANADA, CANADA: REVIEW OF THE 2002 ISBE, MONTREAL.

I must admit, my first impressions of this conference were not good. Our party couldn’t follow the directions provided on the meeting website and got lost among the crowded streets of central Montreal. Even when we reached the UQAM campus, we had problems locating the actual conference building because it was so poorly advertised. It never ceases to amaze me how much of the confusion that plagues conferences could be solved by a few simple arrows or cheaply made signs. Still, a quick trip to the nearby dorms to drop off my stuff and freshen up worked wonders, and I returned to the reception in a more positive frame of mind. Fortuitously, the start of the conference overlapped with the end of the International Jazz Festival, held just a few blocks away from campus. Like many other delegates, I hastened downtown after the mandatory glasses of reception wine, and spent an affable evening
listening to the various bands and watching the street performers.

With more time to get my bearings the following morning, it was immediately apparent that the building in which the conference was held was perfect. The Agora was a large, spacious atrium, multi-layered to allow for easy people-finding, and with *ad libitum* supplies of bagels, fresh fruit, and, most important of all, coffee. Moving between talks was quick and easy since the majority of the rooms were right next to each other, save for a few far-flung outposts thrown in to provide a bit of a challenge. Rooms were designated using animal icons, which generally worked well, although I think the extra expense of having the icons in colour would have avoided some of the navigational problems people had in the first few days.

A quick breakdown of talks by taxon revealed that birds were by far the most popular study subjects (43% of talks), with insects, fish and mammals fighting it out for second place (16%, 15%, and 14% respectively). The equivalent figures for poster presentations were remarkably similar (birds 46%, insects 16%, fish 16%, mammals 12%), which presumably meant that the organizers didn’t allow study taxon to influence the poster/talk decision. I also assumed that they hadn’t been ‘intimidated’ by fame either, as I noticed several established researchers standing beside posters while graduate students were given plenty of opportunity to display their talents in talks.

In the light of Tim Birkhead’s cry for primatologists to attend ISBE meetings in the last newsletter, it was good to see that around a quarter of the mammal presentations concerned primates. One could make an equally plaintive appeal to those studying reptiles and amphibians, two common and widely distributed groups of animals that to me seemed strangely under-represented, particularly as both have been the focus of some high profile studies.

For those students, like myself, who suffer from a nagging unease about their taxonomic inertia, ISBE conferences are great opportunities to appreciate the sheer diversity of the animal kingdom while simultaneously realizing how much of biology stems from a few simple observations. To give a popular, albeit simplified, example, sperm are small and cheap while eggs are large and precious. Hence, males try to maximize the fertilizations they achieve, whereas females try to optimize theirs, and this pattern pretty much holds in all dioecious organisms, regardless of their size, habitat, abundance, neural complexity, or aesthetic appeal. Once you are familiar with the basic principles of a particular research topic, it’s a rewarding experience to merely remain in one’s seat throughout an entire session and see how people studying wildly different animals approach the same question. It might not have been a coincidence that some of the most illuminating sessions that I attended were also those that were the most diverse; for example multiple mating (a mammal, bird, snake and a newt), fertilization dynamics (two birds, a mammal and a fish) and mate choice (a fish, two birds and a moth).

This was a mammoth conference (260 talks in five parallel sessions, plus 240 posters), and I don’t have the space to discuss those talks that I found especially well presented or novel. Still, I can offer a few personal observations on how the featured research areas have waxed and waned. As a testament to the diversity of research on show, I couldn’t say that the conference had a dominant theme. Unsurprisingly, sexual selection and mate choice are both still going strong, and the number of presentations about multiple mating was an emphatic demonstration of the impact DNA fingerprinting has had.

Extra-pair paternity in birds was particularly well represented, and seems to have been given a shot in the arm by some novel genetic analyses. Cooperative breeding was also a popular subject, with one session devoted to avian systems being especially impressive. For those ornithologists who don’t study cooperative
species, it was interesting to note that the pendulum seems to have swung towards unravelling the subtleties of monogamy, with lekking and strongly polygynous species considerably less prominent. The evolution and function of signals, both visual and aural, received much attention, as did sex allocation, particularly in birds. I did get the impression, however, that people have been happy to accumulate empirical data on sex ratio variation in a wide range of species, but have run out of steam when it comes to taking the field forward. To me, this is reminiscent of the tidal wave of data collection that followed the discovery of extra-pair paternity in birds, which then faded to a trickle as people tried to figure out what the species diversity actually meant.

Immunocompetence has retained its popularity, although there were few explicit tests of its progenitor, the Hamilton & Zuk hypothesis. In fact, apart from Frank Cezilly’s excellent plenary on manipulation of host behaviour, parasites no longer seem de rigeur. Modeling seemed less common that in previous ISBEs, there was little work on pre-existing sensory biases, and the MHC doesn’t seem to have attracted the attention that it deserves. Fluctuating asymmetry was conspicuous by its near-absence, and there was nothing on the aerodynamics of bird flight in relation to tail streamers.

I didn’t see anything that I thought was revolutionary, although one could detect topics which are definitely gathering momentum. The emphasis on maternal effects was the most obvious example, particularly the differential allocation of steroids and antibodies into birds’ eggs. A full oral session devoted to learning and cognition was a welcome addition to the ISBE compass, since these subjects, while not new, were entirely absent from the last meeting in Zurich.

On a negative note, there were times when the meeting gave me an uncomfortable feeling of shallowness. The field of behavioral ecology has been described by its arch-cynics as nothing more than a collection of just-so stories. Although I don’t share such an extreme view, I was concerned by the general lack of objectivity with which people presented hypothesis-supporting data, and the readiness with which they glossed over critical assumptions. The attitude among some behavioral ecologists seems to be that for a study to be believable, one only needs to convince other behavioral ecologists. This view is short sighted, in my opinion. If behavioral ecology is to gain acceptance by other established disciplines, then it must treat them with more respect than the cursory nod they are currently afforded. Assumptions borrowed from other fields should be carefully verified before proceeding, preferably with the help of a specialist collaborator.

To be fair, I got the impression that behavioral ecology is at least trying to integrate research from other disciplines, and some of the more convincing talks probably ended up that way thanks to the input of their endocrinologist, physiologist or geneticist co-authors. The more networks are opened, the better. As any spider will tell you, the more strands that are attached, the stronger the web. Anyway, soapbox off!

The 10 plenaries were wide-ranging, well attended, and well presented. Considering the recent profusion of ‘sexy’ subjects in behavioral ecology, it was refreshing to find that many people I talked to thought that the highlights of the meeting were the two consecutive plenaries by Louis Lefebvre (innovation rate in birds) and Reuven Dukas (the biological foundation of cognitive constraints), both of which were firmly rooted in classical ethology. The organizers scored a considerable coup in getting Bob Trivers to deliver the Hamilton lecture, on selfish genetic elements and social behaviour, and he certainly didn’t disappoint, sliding effortlessly between taxa in a thought provoking exposition of the games genes play.

The three evening poster sessions proved very popular, and people took advantage of the opportunity to view the presentations during the
day. Still, I think the general feeling was that 90 minutes wasn’t long enough to get around the two rooms, as evidenced by the difficulty in getting people to leave at the end! Many discussions were carried down to the Bar l’Apres-Cours, where, even after midnight, one could still hear heated and surprisingly highbrow debates raging among gaggles of delegates. This reinforced my personal belief that the most productive poster sessions (and conferences in general) are those in which people are given a few drinks to loosen their tongue, then gently funneled into a large room and provided with even more drinks.

Another great plus for this conference was Montreal itself. Anyone feeling jaded after too many talks merely had to walk out the door and they would be instantly invigorated. Colorful buildings, a cosmopolitan crowd, ethnic shops, lively bars, and, best of all, abundant opportunities for trying some unusual foods. In the space of just five days I sampled the cuisine of Ethiopia, India, Thailand, Greece, China and Japan, often bumping into other behavioral ecologists enjoying the variety. I also saw many delegates slaving over cold beers and fruit juices in the sunny terrace cafes which lined St-Denis Street: it’s a hard life.

The conference banquet, held at a traditional ‘sugar shack’ deep in the Quebec countryside, was certainly a memorable evening. Anyone frustrated by the less than optimal serving arrangements in the suspiciously quaint souvenir shop must surely have been mollified by the bottles of gorgeous, locally produced maple syrup waiting at each table. Still, two sausages, some beans and cold mashed potato was scant reward for what had been a long and hungry wait for the main course, and the evening looked in grave danger of fading away into nothingness. Indeed, many people were probably relieved to get a seat on the first coaches back to Montreal and have an early night. Little did they know what they would miss, as a mysterious stimulus suddenly transformed the huddled cliques of mumbling scientists into a unified mass of swirling legs and flailing arms. I shall never forget the sight of well-respected figures moving benches, forming conga lines, dancing on tables, and basically having a good, old-fashioned sing along.

The organizers, Luc-Alain Giraldeau and Don Kramer, had done a superb job. They deserve particular credit for being aware of, and quickly rectifying, the occasional problems which cropped up during the meeting (non-existent air conditioning, fire alarms, deafening chipmunk alarm calls, inaccessible food tables etc). All in all, this was a memorable conference on many levels, and if its memes are promulgated into the next generation, we can all look forward to Finland in 2004.

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