

European Regional Meeting, July 2000

The second European Regional Meeting took place at the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, Germany (HLMD) over July 7th to 9th. HLMD provided a magnificent setting and we owe Dr Ina Busch (the Director) and the Museum a big vote of thanks for the hospitality we received and for the great support they gave to Wolfgang Schneider who had clearly spent a lot of time and effort organising such an efficient and enjoyable three days. Their generosity included, among many things, a very impressive banner which hung proudly outside the Museum entrance.

Despite almost continuous rain, spirits were high and, judging by the continuous buzz of conversation, all 23 participants (from eight different countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Japan, Sweden, UK) enjoyed themselves greatly. The only disappointment was the absence of Anatoly Haritinov, one of our members from Siberia; he had planned to attend but, sadly, in the end was unable to get a visa.

To open the proceedings, Ina Busch welcomed us to the Museum and wished us a happy, profitable Meeting. This was the only formal part of the weekend! Friday morning and the whole of Saturday were taken up with the presentation of informal illustrated talks which were of high quality and, in the company of their presenters, we enjoyed visits to Brazil (Werner Piper and also Matthias Hartung), Ghana (K-D Dijkstra), Tunisia (Reinhard Joedicke), Turkey (Vincent Kalkman) and Uganda (Viola Clausnitzer). Jill Silsby showed pictures of "beautiful dragonflies" from around the world, Göran Sahlén whetted our appetites with pictures of what we may expect in the way of the countryside in Sweden, and Hans Klaus Pfau patiently and enthusiastically demonstrated his mechanical model of a dragonfly's wing - a session that evoked extreme interest. Perhaps the most interesting of all was a video shown by Martin Lindeboom illustrating copulation of calopterygids: to see Jonathan Waage's 1979 research on sperm displacement illustrated in slow motion and in such brilliant close-up was a real treat!

On the Friday afternoon we enjoyed a guided tour through the Messel exhibition in the Geology, Palaeontology & Mineralogy Department, followed by a rainy expedition to the nearby Messel Pit, an archaeological and paleontological site where oilshale was quarried until 1971. Fossils have been found ranging from plants and insects through fish, toads with their spawn, reptiles and birds to mammals such as opossum-like marsupials and small-sized horses - but so far, no Odonata! The oilshale originated from sludge deposits at the bottom of a freshwater lake, dating as lowermost Middle Eocene (ca 49 million years old). The sight of 23 odonatologists clutching lethal looking knives and delving into the sides of small hillocks must have intrigued passers by!!

Finally, on Sunday morning, we formed a circle and held an informal discussion at which participants were asked for their views on how WDA was going about its task of being a democratic, conservation-minded and scientific society. There were only two Board members present (the third, Robert Ketelaar, had had to leave the evening before) but we were both extremely grateful for the thoughtful contributions that were made during the session. "Pantala" came in for the most discussion (which was what we expected); many points were made and there were many suggestions but the consensus of opinion was that, considering the Journal had had to start from scratch without a single paper as a base from which it could begin, it was a considerable achievement on the part of Editor and Publishers to get it to the state in which it now appeared - a journal of which we could be proud; and it was agreed that each succeeding issue had been an improvement on the one preceding it. There was discussion on cost and editorial policy; on content and on appearance - confidence was expressed that improvements already made would continue into the future.

The Odonatological Abstracting Service was praised, as was AGRION and suggestions were made regarding possible venues for another European Meeting in two years time. The discussion closed with expressions of surprise and pleasure that such a democratic meeting could be held and with thanks to those members of the Board of Trustees who had guided the emerging society to the position it holds today.

Thank you Wolfgang for organising such a happy and worthwhile event and thank you to all the participants for helping to make it go with a swing!

Jill Silsby