

Opening address

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I suppose that I was asked to open this meeting because I have been involved with stoneflies for a very long time. I published my first paper on these insects 43 years ago so that makes me fairly senior, although there are at least three plecopterologists around who started publishing before I did — Mitsuko Kohno, John Hanson and Bill Ricker.

Thinking back to those days before World War II makes one realize how very much we have progressed in our knowledge of Plecoptera. A meeting such as this one would have been unthinkable then, and we all owe much to Jacques Aubert who had the foresight to convene the first one in 1956 in Lausanne. That was a small meeting (7 people), it included about half the active students of Plecoptera and was entirely European. Now our meetings have a worldwide attendance, they are much larger and they encompass only a fairly small proportion of the people who concern themselves with stoneflies.

Back in the thirties there was a fair amount of purely descriptive taxonomy but very little else. I could find only three papers that dealt at any length with the biology of stoneflies. They were Schoenemund's (1924) *Biologie der Tiere Deutschlands*, Frison's (1929) Fall and winter stoneflies of Illinois, and Kührtreiber's (1934) *Plekopterenfauna Nordtirols*. I was able to correspond with the last two, but the war soon cut me off from Austria, and it prevented me from discovering that Per Brinck was beginning his monumental study of Swedish species. So the few of us who were working on stoneflies in those days were doing so in considerable isolation.

Indeed, the only people with whom I could discuss my problems were Kimmins and Mosely at the British Museum, and our ignorance was really rather profound. Even in Britain, with its limited and fairly well worked fauna, we could not identify all nymphs to genus, let alone to species. We knew little about controlling factors or life histories. The dogma was

that nymphs were carnivores and that adults did not feed. We knew nothing about drumming — one could go on and on.

Then in the late forties and fifties many people began to publish, and many of the earlier workers who had begun before the war got into their stride. Names such as Kohno, Despax, Ricker and Jewett come to mind, and they were joined by a crowd of newcomers who were active in the fifties : Brinck, Aubert, Raušer, Gaufin, Berthélemy, Balinsky, Zhiltzova, and, in particular because of his worldwide interest, his broad sweep of ideas and his infectious enthusiasm, the late, and very much missed, Joachim Illies.

There were others, but these were the major contributors, and they changed the whole scene. Very extensive work increased through the sixties and seventies, so that now, within less than half a century, it is probably true to say that the Plecoptera are among the best known of the smaller insect orders.

There are, of course, still areas of the planet that remain poorly worked, and doubtless there are many aspects of ecology, anatomy and physiology of which we know nothing. But it is at gatherings such as this that we exchange ideas and stimulate one another.

I thank our French hosts for having convened this meeting, which will be, I am sure, as fruitful as its predecessors. Fifty years on, if we keep on going as we are, we really should know a great deal about Plecoptera - but by then they may all have been polluted away !

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