

# The Annual Scientific Meeting 2008

**The FBA Annual Scientific Meeting was held on 15-16 July, 2008 in the splendid setting of Fishmongers' Hall, London by courtesy of the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers. We enticed FBA Member and ASM delegate, Jim Leeming to write an account of the event. Eds.**

The Meeting on the Theme "Science in Industry: The Application of Freshwater Science in Practice" was attended by some 60 delegates, with back-up support services ably provided by various FBA personnel. Attendees from the UK and overseas represented a wide of academic and research institutions, commercial interests and environmental agencies; and individual members of the Association were also present. Fortunately, despite the generally wet summer, the sun shone for the duration of the meeting so delegates were also able to enjoy the immediate outdoor ambience of the venue on the Thames embankment.

The two day meeting consisted of a blend of scientific papers and optional visits to various sites in the London area. A valuable adjunct to the meeting was the poster session, with the eventual award for the best student poster going to Shaun Cotter of Queen Mary, University of London for his poster on "Impacts of watercress farms on the ecological integrity of chalk streams" (augmented with a bag of watercress). The prize for the student paper went to FBA student member Iain Russon, University of Southampton, for his paper on "the behavioural response of fish to barriers to migration".

Papers on the first day focused on the application of freshwater science in the UK power industry and on the behavioural response of fish to barriers to migration, with an international flavour introduced by speakers on the loss of water resources in Malta (an account by Dr Sylvia Haslam, University of Cambridge); the role of aquatic ecosystems in South Africa; and the effects of Nile Perch on fishing and otters in Lake Victoria, Kenya.

The afternoon was taken up with selected visits to various sites of interest in the London area, including the Thames

Flood Barrier, the Linnean Society, the Darwin Centre of the Natural History Museum and the WWT London Wetland Centre, following which delegates returned to the Hall for a special session to discuss the Cooperative Research Partnership, facilitated by Alan Hildrew, Alistair Ferguson and Bill Brierley.

In the evening, the Vice President's reception and an excellent Conference dinner with wines provided the opportunity for delegates to develop their social, language and networking skills!

On the second day, the papers covered a diverse range of topics, including ecological quality relating to the Water Framework Directive; the distribution of freshwater fauna and flora in underground and surface waters and the significance for water supply and treatments; and control strategies for non-native fish species (topmouth gudgeon) in the UK. By comparison, an account of the use of fish as monitors of pollution in the River Indus, Pakistan provided a useful reminder of the problems generated by the sheer size and scale of such rivers in Asia and a presentation of the results of studies of the distribution of *Ephemera notata* in Poland presented an intriguing picture, whereby only females are found in the south of the country.

The ASM was followed by the Annual General Meeting, including reports, presentation of accounts and the election of officers, council and honorary members. The relatively few members who stayed for the AGM were able to express their views about the future of the FBA in attracting funding and maintaining the role of the organisation as a renowned centre of freshwater science and research.

Overall the ASM was a successful scientific and social gathering, but given the applied theme of the Meeting, the poor attendance by water industry technical staff and managers was somewhat disappointing, with the majority of delegates from (and presumably supported by) academic and research institutions. Hopefully, this was a reflection more of funding difficulties in the present climate rather than a lack of relevance or interest, but perhaps future applied science

meetings need to target water authorities and other organisations to bring together specific issues of the day and explore and develop future strategies with technical experts and managers. (Long in the tooth FBA members may remember the very successful Technical Officers Conferences which used to be held regularly at Ferry House in the 1960-70s and from which many applied methodologies were promulgated and developed).

Whilst the venue was first class, it should be recognised that London in July is not the cheapest or most convenient location to attract members who are students, retired or who do not receive financial support from their employers. Where to next year?

## Jim Leeming



Guest speaker, Richard Aylard of Thames Water, opens the conference (© Louise Miles, FBA).



Clive Askew, FBA Representative of the Fishmongers' Company, offers a vote of thanks (© Louise Miles, FBA).

# Around the Tours

## Natural History Museum – Darwin Centre

The Darwin Centre is the new, state-of-the-art, £78 million addition to the Natural History Museum. The tour for delegates gave us a preview of a tiny proportion of the collections the museum safeguards. Standing in a temperature-controlled room with preserved mammals, marsupials and fish ‘peering’ out at you from their glassy cases was a surreal and truly fascinating experience. The highlight however was the giant squid specimen which spanned almost the entire length of the room – definitely worth seeing! (Louise Miles).

## WWT London Wetland Centre

The London Wetland Centre is a mosaic of ponds and pools, reedbed, grazing marsh, wet woodland, a wader scrape and riverside flooded meadow. In a partnership between Thames Water and the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust the 42 ha site was created out of redundant water storage reservoirs. The visit was hosted by Dr Richard Bullock, the Centre’s Chief Ecology Officer, who took delegates to an area known as “wildside” to look a bit closer at various plants that colonise the site and hopefully catch a glimpse of the elusive water voles. Although we didn’t manage to see a live specimen we did manage to find “evidence” of voles that had been re-introduced to the Centre in a captive breeding and release programme. We did have more luck in identifying the many macrophytes that colonise the wetlands and at one point in the afternoon we had Richard hanging off a bridge, holding on with one finger to retrieve a sample of what could be a stonewort. Joanne Denyer from RPS kindly took a sample away to try and see if she could identify which particular species.

The afternoon was thoroughly interesting and the Centre is a wonderful place to visit; if you haven’t been it is highly recommended. (Christian Ripley)

## Linnean Society

The Linnean Society is steeped in history being one of the oldest Learned Societies in London, founded in 1788. Our tour began in the meeting room where two imposing portraits of Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace dominated the walls, as the first paper on the theory of evolution was presented here in 1858. We were then led into a temperature and humidity controlled strongroom which is also flood, fire and bomb proof! Here we were privileged to view a wealth of plants, fish, shell and insect specimens which form a fundamental part of the Society’s collections. Many samples had been collected by Linnaeus’s “disciples” from the world-over and then carefully catalogued, some including small sketches and descriptions by Linnaeus to



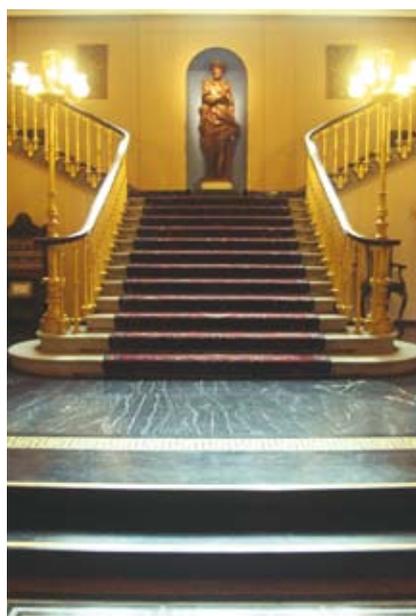
The CRP special session convened by Alan Hildrew, Mike Dobson, Alastair Ferguson and Bill Brierley (© Louise Miles, FBA).



Delegates enjoy the conference dinner in the Court Dining Room (© Louise Miles, FBA).



Coffee and tea served in splendour (© Louise Miles, FBA).



The main staircase at the Fishmongers’ Hall leading up to the conference room (© Louise Miles, FBA).

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accompany them as the binomial naming system was in its infancy. We ended our tour in the newly restored Library - this impressive room holds information on plant and animal classification dating back to 1483 and is a welcoming and tranquil retreat in central London. It was a fascinating tour and provides a wonderful insight into natural history. (Sarah Johnson & Julie McNicol)

### Thames Barrier

The Thames flood barrier is an amazing achievement in civil engineering. Spanning a 523 metre wide stretch of the River Thames, its primary purpose is to protect London from flooding by particularly high tides or those tides exacerbated by a storm surge. The ten flood gates can be raised to block incoming water or alternatively to contain the outward flow of water to control upstream levels. The floodgates are supported by nine concrete pillars and it was into one of these that the ASM delegates were taken, after an excellent introductory talk and video and a comprehensive question and answer session. Suitably attired in hard hats, we were guided along many metres of tunnel into the heart of pillar number four to view the actual floodgate mechanism, and then outside to view the gates from above. One of the gates was closed during our visit, probably not for our benefit but rather as part of the ongoing testing of the facility. We were honoured to have access to areas not usually open to the public and our thanks go to the Environment Agency for a most interesting and unusual visit. (Mike Dobson & Ian Dunn)



**Bronze statue of Sir Peter Scott, founder of the WWT, observing a swan at the London Wetland Centre (© WWT).**



**One of the nine concrete pillars comprising the Thames Barrier (© Arpingstone ).**



**The giant pickled squid in the Darwin Centre of the Natural History Museum (© Louise Miles, FBA).**

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