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to enable us to keep our four large red-tailed catfish in one tank - a display which is unique in the UK! (recently featured in a national aquarists' magazine). We are also looking into other developments and possible sponsorship schemes.

The next twelve months look exciting as we should complete the new store, open the new gallery and make great progress in biological recording, collection documentation, preventative conservation etc. - all in line with the Business Plan! The only negative side is that we still have no geologist. The post is still there, 'not dead - just resting', and is a high priority for development in the future.

Steve Garland

STILL MADRID

Yes, a Madrid story that surfaced (so to speak) after the Great Flood of Perth and which is presented here, despite being hopelessly after the fact, as a sad memorial to all those who still can't stop talking about it:

By now, those of you who didn't get to Madrid will have heard about it from those who did. Those who did go will now be sick of being ignored at tea-breaks and shunned at parties. Facts will have become irrelevant detail; rumours will have become libel actions and unsubstantiated stories will have become legends. So wherein lies the truth? What were the **really** important sessions and events? Where was the chicken's beak? Who is Elvis O'Horne? The truth can now be told.

Madrid in May is a tremendous place to be, 33° and never a cloud in the sky. The nights are warm and lively and San Isidro kicks off her shoes and celebrates her birthday (what!?). Tremendous that is (violins maestro) unless you are attending an international symposium for 6 days. The statistics speak for themselves - 64 hours indoors working backed up with 30 hours sleep (the remaining 50 hours I leave to your imagination). There's little wonder that we came back so pale! Rest assured that those returning with tans must have been skiving ("What? - Davis you're fired! - oh yes, you already are")

Obviously in such an intensive week the delegates must have learned a great deal. We certainly did. The ability to say "excuse me, the black ball

seems to be stuck" in Spanish can prove invaluable - in a variety of circumstances. As can knowledge of the complete works of Lennon & McCartney, as Simon Moore admirably proved. Are you sure they wrote the Marseillaise?

An ongoing study of chicken anatomy throughout the week proved particularly rewarding. Not least when on the final day of the Symposium, awards were given by the King's nephew for 'the most complete chicken'. Those of us who had been collecting various parts during our stay gleaned much pleasure, not only from the search for limbs, but from the final construction on Thursday evening. How we all cheered when Chris Collins located the missing beak behind our interpreter's ear! The thrill of seeing the final wing sticking out of the paella! the excitement of finding the crushed synsacrum at the conference lunch! And who could forget the plate of chicken bottoms served so beautifully on the first night? It was this kind of attention to detail by the organisers which really made it a pleasure to be there!

The catering was especially organised for the Symposium. The soup provided a real brain-teaser for the botanical taxonomists and the bread amused many a geologist. We were delighted to discover that the custard finally plugged a few gaps in studies on pre-Cambrian life-forms but were devastated by the news that three species in the main course had become extinct before the meal arrived (due to an unexpected diversion caused by roadworks outside Paris). After all of this the final banquet at a castle was eagerly awaited. Unfortunately the reenactment of the loaves and fishes miracle didn't come off! Times were hard; many turned to the evil drink and one Swiss delegate was seen scratching a meagre existence on bat-droppings. It emerged later that the evening's event was a plot to undermine taxonomic research by encouraging starving delegates to throw themselves from the battlements. We were all underwhelmed.

What of the programme?

The facilities were big - and over two miles from the dining hall! The air-conditioning could do an impressive 80 to 0 in under ten seconds. Someone gave us all a personal stereo (for translations) but all the programmes we tuned in to were foreign!

It was also disconcerting to find yourself in a room with hundreds of taxonomists hell-bent on a 'quick and dirty' future! Still, we finally found out what para-taxonomy really is - no longer will we be frustrated by pieces of insects blowing away after jumping out of the plane (think about it! - perhaps not).

Sadly, many questions remain such as : Is Stefan Michalski really a hologram? How many hectares of rainforest were destroyed during the Chairman's introduction? and how many national museum directors do you really need to change a light bulb; perhaps you could answer that one for us Don (Neil, Craig, Alan . . .)

What of the characters taking part? To be honest, there was some confusion about who was who! So many seemed to be using aliases that it was hard to identify who they really were. Neil Charmers (sic - surely not?); Donald (parenthetically speaking) Duckworth; Des Griffin and Velson Horie. Are these people scared of something? Why not admit who you really are?

Getting down to more serious aspects, a particular highlight was the party thrown in honour of Dick Hendry's uptieth birthday. Live band, dancing, fireworks and so many well-wishers that poor Dick didn't know what had hit him. There wasn't a dry throat in the house. So moving

So moving in fact that a party coach was organised the following night to prove we hadn't imagined it. If you can picture 20+ internationally renowned (cough) museum professionals dancing around a 4ft high pile of handbags you begin to get a flavour of the evening. Certain photographic evidence in our possession shows a number of UK delegates dancing with Rosemary (Giz-a-grant) Ewles while Neil Chalmers, thinly disguised as Yassa Arafat (shurely shome mistake, allegedly) looks on. A wide variety of well-known Australians were left in the gutter en route, while the South African contingent made up for decades of sanctions by almost every social means possible! All this and beer served in buckets; what more could we ask for? 'More' was the cry!

Onwards to a nightclub where the peseta to beer exchange rate swung wildly against all market predictions - and hopes. Others flicked through

phrase books to translate 'Senor, you appear to have carelessly spilt my drink!' 'Que!!'

A smaller group split off at this point to show the Rt Hon James Dickinson the way to a notorious pool room and herb garden ('What you mean, you wan' drink from glass gringo?!') Upon arrival at which, he turned and fled. Was it something we said or had he just chased after a passing cardinal? (I beg your pardon?!)

Naturally, all of the above events are merely fabrications from our fevered minds and never did, will or should be allowed to occur in the future, past or present. If you see photographs of delegates and wonder why they are always in bars - its only because photography wasn't allowed in the lectures and workshops (that was what we agreed to say wasn't it - edit this bit out!). A week in Madrid with 450 Natural Historians is hard work. Believe us!

Yours with maniacal laughter

Los tres Amigos

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Back Issues - The editor now has the stock of back issues. A full list will appear in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, any enquiries to the editor.

The views expressed in the Newsletter do not represent the views or policy of the Biology Curators Group Committee or membership except where specifically stated.

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