

1-7 August 1999

St Louis, MO,
USAInternational Botanical
Congress

Contact Don Pfister or Meredith Blackwell with any ideas of topics that will be of interest to the botanical community as a whole, as well as to mycology. Although the meeting is not until 1999, we must offer suggestions now if they are to be considered.

If you know of any other conferences, symposia, workshops, *etc.* that may be of interest to members, please send us the details so the information can be included in the next *Newsletter*.

C. Grgurinovic

REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY COUNCIL

Conferences

Logging of native forests was discussed in a workshop held on 12 January 1996 in Sydney. The workshop was sponsored by the Mullum Foundation and was used by the National Biodiversity (NBC) Councillors to develop a response to government forestry policies, particularly the Comprehensive Adequate and Representative (CAR) reservation process. Councillors involved included Harry Recher, Hugh Possingham, Roger Kitching and Margaret Blakers.

Forest management was also the focus of a conference organised by Pierre Horwitz and co-sponsored by the NBC and the Centre for Ecosystem Management, Edith Cowan University. The Design of Reserves for Nature Conservation in the Darling Botanical District, South-Western Australia was held on 26 June 1995.

Educating the Government

The NBC has been actively involved in formal decision making. Councillors have been working on several Government committees, including:

- Expert Advisory Group for the Regional Forest Assessment in Tasmania.
- NSW Biological Diversity Advisory Committee (BDAC).
- AQIS review panel.
- Commonwealth State of the Environment Committee.
- NSW Biological Survey Program Steering Committee.
- NSW Resource and Conservation Assessment Council (RACAC).
- Federal Government's BDAC.

In addition there have been two formal submissions made on specific threats to Australia's biodiversity:

1. Submission to the Environmental Protection Authority on the Development of Cape Range Peninsula, Western Australia. Pierre Horwitz and the Council argued that the area is home to some remarkable fauna, most notably, globally rare groups of Crustaceans, and recommended that planning take into account the potential impact on, and likely loss of, biodiversity.
2. Submission to the Australian Quarantine Review Committee on the Importation of Exotic Species. Pierre Horwitz and the Council argued that exotic species cause environmental problems in the Australian landscape which require an economic response. Insufficient regard is paid to potential environmental costs of deliberately introduced species. Under GATT, Australia may feel obliged to accept many more exotic species than is in the national environmental interest. They recommended that:
 - Quarantine provisions should exist between Australian bioregions, into Australia and out of Australia.
 - Adoption of the precautionary principle to protect Australian biodiversity should be recognised as a legitimate objective under the Technical barriers to Trade Agreement.
 - Native species must be investigated for their potential to fill the role proposed to be filled by a non-native species.
 - The impact of any translocations on natural ecosystems must be assessed.
 - Remote areas that are free from introduced organisms should be protected through legislation.
 - Escape of translocated organisms from confinement must be regarded as inevitable.

- Translocations should only be done using propagules, to minimise the risk of accidental introduction of parasites, symbionts, etc.

The new National Biodiversity Council

There will be four key changes:

1. A secretariat will be employed to ensure effective communication between the Assembly and the Council, and to make sure that any responses are made in a timely fashion. The secretariat will also maintain the network of scientific experts, so that all NBC actions are well informed.
2. Assembly members will be able to make submissions and public comments on behalf of the NBC, but only after ratification by the Council to ensure that the NBC has a consistent agenda.
3. The Council will be expanded from 12 to 18 members. This will reduce the workload on individual councillors and allow greater diversity of scientific representation.
4. The Council will have quotas that must be filled. These include a minimum of 1/3 of the Council to be women, 1/3 to be men and 1/3 of the positions are to be filled by non-tenured scientists.

Funding

Without a paid secretariat the NBC will grind to a halt. The NBC urgently needs financial support to establish the secretariat's position. Additional funding will also be sought for running conferences, and covering costs that councillors might incur while representing the NBC. The NBC is seeking incorporation and will apply for tax deductability.

Outlook

There is enormous scope for expanding and improving the NBC. Already in the pipe line are a WWW site, embryonic State branches and issue-specific committees. A secretariat's position has already been established in Western Australia although it is not fully funded.

Environmental debate in Australia sorely lacks scientific input. The agenda are set by developers or government, with green groups reacting. It is our responsibility to make our voices heard and to force governments to recognise the value and implications of our research. The NBC provides a powerful framework that not only gives scientists a voice, but amplifies that voice in a way that people will not be able to ignore. When the new NBC is established, we will be able to build on the foundations laid by the former council, to bring science to the forefront of conservation debates.

Don Driscoll, NBC 1996 Co-ordinator

BOOK REVIEW

Paul Stamets, (1996). *Psilocybin Mushrooms of the World—An Identification Guide.*
Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, California, USA. ISBN 0-89815-839-7, 243 pages, illustrated with colour prints. Price US\$24.95.

Towards the end of the 1970s, when interest in the possible occurrence of psilocybin mushrooms in Europe was just awakening, there was hardly any literature on the subject except for Roger Heims' now classic treatise on *Les champignons toxiques et hallucinogènes*. In this book Heim presented *Psilocybe semilanceata* and *Panaeolus subbalteatus* as psilocybin-containing mushrooms which could be found in Europe, but analytical data were still lacking then.

On the other hand, in the USA, a whole subculture surrounding the recreational use of at least half a dozen of these mushroom species existed already. A stream of pamphlets and field guides, often of poor quality, provided information on the identification and location of the hallucinogenic fungi growing in North America. A book that really distinguished itself favourably from all those amateurish publications was Paul Stamets' *Psilocybe mushrooms and their allies* (1978) published by Homestead Book Company, Seattle. This guide did not only give user-friendly keys for the genera *Stropharia*, *Psilocybe* and *Panaeolus*, but also excellent descriptions of the individual species, illustrated with very good colour prints. This book has been most helpful to those European mycologists who wanted to find out whether these mushrooms could also be found in their respective countries.