

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: XXII International Congress of Entomology.....

Travel Dates: 15-21st August 2004.....

Location: Brisbane Australia

Group Member(s): Alex Hayward.....

Aims: To experience presenting research at an international conference.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-



The International Congress of Entomology is the biggest event in the entomologists' calendar. Held every 4 years since 1910, the congress presents the opportunity to experience the cutting edge of international entomological research. More than 3000 entomologists from over 78 countries attended the 22nd congress held this year in Brisbane, Australia.

The congress was held in the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre on the city's South Bank complex, and the laid-back locals seemed to cope remarkably well with the arrival of thousands of entomologists, a breed of biologists not known for their lack of eccentricity...

The theme for this year's congress was 'Strength in Diversity', a particularly apt theme for a congress dealing with insects, and for one based in Australia. Insects are the most diverse animal group on earth, comprising over 800,000 of all species so far described. Indeed, the great biologist JBS Haldane once remarked that the Creator, if He exists, must have "an inordinate fondness for beetles."! However, whilst many other organisms enjoy high status in the public consciousness, insects are often sadly overlooked. This is despite their role as purveyors of important ecosystem services such as pollination, decomposition, and plumbing of soils. Australia is one of only seventeen 'megadiverse' countries which collectively hold about two thirds of the planet's biodiversity, and is particularly important for its huge number of endemic organisms, many of which are insects.

Australia has a chequered history in dealings with insects, ranging from the successful use of exotic dung beetles to recycle the dung produced by introduced cattle (and thus rendering the infamous cork hat largely redundant), to the hugely unsuccessful attempt to control cane chafers with the use of toads from the Americas. The emblem for this year's congress was a honey-pot ant, a type of Australian ant that stores honeydew in their gasters, and has been known as great source of "bush-tucker" to locals for some time.

My PhD has focussed on the evolutionary ecology of gall wasp communities, and I was luckily to have the opportunity to present a paper at the congress in a special symposium on the Biology and Ecology of Gall-inducing Insects. Presenting my research in front of the leading world experts in my field was a daunting experience, but was hugely useful. The symposium went very well and stimulated much interest and the contributors, including myself, are currently working on papers for a journal special edition as a direct result of participation in the congress. In addition to the direct academic value from attending the conference, I enjoyed meeting and making friends with both local and international people involved in entomology, with a

particular highlight being the meal organised by local students on the last night. Overall, the opportunity to participate in the conference was a hugely beneficial experience and I wish to thank the people involved with the James Rennie Bequest for their work and support, without which it would not have been possible.