

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: "Linking Tropical Biology with Human Dimensions"

Travel Dates: 14th July 2007- 19th July 2007

Location: Centre for Ecosystems Research, UNAM and University of San Nicolas de Hidalgo, Morelia, Michoacán, MEXICO.

Group Member(s): Juan Carlos Ruiz Guajardo

Aims: To contribute with an oral presentation about conservation genetics of an economically important species of Sub-Saharan tree. To discuss new ideas for future collaborations with leading scientists working on similar topics in different institutions, and update my knowledge on the latest research about tropical ecosystems that is currently being conducted worldwide.

OUTCOME

Michoacán, derives from the Nahuatl terms *michin* (fish), *hua* (those who have) and *can* (place) which put together mean "fishermen's place". The State of Michoacán, forms part of the central western part of Mexico and extends 59,864 sq. km. (23,113 sq. mi.). The city of Morelia is its capital city and has a rich history that extends before the Spanish colony. Before the arrival of the Spaniards, the region was inhabited by the people known as the Pirindas, and the place was called "Guayangareo". Morelia was officially founded on May 18, 1541 by the first viceroy of New Spain Antonio de Mendoza, as "City of Michoacán". It was inhabited by 50 Spanish noble families and by purepecha Indians. In 1545, the name was changed to "Valladolid". In 1580, Valladolid replaced Pátzcuaro as the capital of Michoacán. During the colonial period a number of religious orders established themselves in the city, allowing it to take an important place in the history of art and culture in Mexico. Important architectural sites from the colonial period include the Cathedral of Morelia, the Aqueduct (built between 1785 and 1789 by Fray Antonio de San Miguel), the Governor's Palace, the Palacio Clavijero, and numerous churches, convents, and houses. The Conservatorio de Música de las Rosas of Morelia was the first music conservatory in the Americas.

The Historic Downtown Area encompasses approximately 150 city blocks at the city centre, roughly corresponding to the urban area of the city at the end of the eighteenth century. The city centre contains over 1,000 historical buildings and sites. Morelia is characterized by the magnificence of its monuments which are mostly colonial. The most remarkable buildings are the baroque cathedral, finished in 1744; the convent of San Francisco, built in 1513; the convent of San Agustin, founded in 1550; the college and temple of La Compañía de Jesus, started in 1580 and

known as Palacio Clavijero; the convent of El Carmen, constructed in 1597; the convent of Santa Catarina that dates from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.



Baroque Cathedral of Morelia



Palace of the Executive



College of San Nicolás de Hidalgo

The conference was organised by the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC) and was hosted by the University of San Nicolas de Hidalgo (most important Univeristy in Michoacán State) and the Centre for Ecosystem Research part of the National University of Mexico (UNAM). All buildings utilised for the oral presentations, plenary talks and discussion forums where part of the historical downtown, thus providing a beautiful set up for the conference. The conference received a lot of attention from the media with important politicians such as the governor of the State of Michoacán Sr. Lázaro Cárdenas Batel and Juan Hinks the National Secretary for Environment and Natural Resources, attending the opening ceremony at the Palace of the Executive (see pictures above).

The conference gathered more than 400 scientists from 35 different countries participating with oral presentations, posters, discussion groups, workshops and plenary talks. During the conference, ten plenary talks on ecological and conservation related topics were presented at the College of San Nicolas de Hidalgo (picture above). Plenary talks where scheduled at 8:00 and 18:00 hrs daily and where given by internationally renowned scientists from different countries. Plenary speakers included Dr. Jose Sarukhan Kermes, Dr. Kamljit S. Bawa, Dr. John Vandermeer, Dr. Victoria Sork, Dr. Scott Armbruster and Dr. Lisa M. Curran among other well known names. The key note lectures touched controversial topics such as the contradictions between conservation and the use of tropical ecosystems in Mexico, the economic and political drivers of land use in Borneo and the ecological theory, political reality and the role of agroecosystems in a new conservation paradigm. All plenary talks were of excellent quality and very stimulating for young researchers like me attempting to understand the dynamics driving a world that struggles to reconcile political and economical needs with the imperious necessity of conserving rapidly disappearing ecosystems.

During the conference, more than 500 presentations were given as part of the oral presentations sections, with extra 300 talks presented as part of the 35 different symposia organised by different research groups. Symposia topics ranged from conservation of oak trees, forest ecosystems and tropical plants, to pollination in fragmented communities, fragmentation of landscapes conservation genetics and identifying the effects of global climate change in primates, birds, bats and several plant groups.

My oral presentation “Comparing natural and anthropogenic fragmentation in the Sub-Saharan tree species *Acacia mellifera*” was presented as part of the symposium denominated -Forest fragmentation and conservation genetics of plants-. During the conference I had the opportunity to discuss some of my research results and other findings with worldwide renowned specialists on the two areas that interest me more, conservation genetics and applied ecology. The opportunity to discuss with Dr. Sork, Dr Armbruster, Dr. Kettle, Dr. Mauricio Quesada and Dr. Nuñez-Farfán (just to mention few names) significantly contributed to my formation as a scientists and it was encouraging and stimulating.

The conference was a total success not only because of the great quality of the work exposed on it, but because the organisers thought in several social events designed to promote interaction between the attendees. Some of these events included a traditional gig of Mexican folkloric music and dances performed by the Official Ballet Company from the state of Michoacán at the Conservatorio de las Rosas, an evening of classic music performed by the National Orchestra of Michoacán at the Baroque Cathedral, and a banquet closing supper featuring firework special visual events with Mariachi (traditional Mexican street ensemble) organised at the Palacio de Gobierno an impressive building made of pink limestone dating back to 1550.

Overall, attending this conference was extremely enjoyable and useful. The experience significantly contributed to the development of my communicating skills a fundamental part of a successful scientific career. It allowed me to measure the quality of my work and learn from other colleagues, situation that is both encouraging and challenging. This meeting also provided me with a forum to discuss potential future collaborations with other research groups and institutions.

I would like to finish my report by sincerely thanking the Rennie Bequest Fund for its generous financial support that made my attendance to this conference possible.