

*Letter to Editor***Two International Meetings on Animal Behaviour**

Sir,

This is a report to you and the readers of ATS about two scientific events on animal behaviour that took place in Indiana, USA. Both events reflected the growing interest of scientists in many aspects of animal behaviour. New technologies make the observations and recordings more precise, and better understanding of details completes the knowledge of behaviour.

The first conference named "Behavior 2011" was held at the Indiana University campus in Bloomington, July 25-30. It was a joint meeting of the Animal Behavior Society (48<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting) and the International Ethological Conference (32<sup>nd</sup> IEC) of the International Council of Ethologists. The event was hosted by the IU Center for the Integrative Study of Animal Behavior (CSIAB), one of the largest and longest-running groups of behaviour researchers in the world. The scientific programme was impressive with some 1100 participants from 38 countries, and it included more than 60 invited presentations from distinguished speakers including eight plenary talks and nine symposia. The conference hosted nearly 800 contributed short talks and 460 posters. The range of animal species was broad – from ants to elephants, animals in their natural habitats as well as domesticated species and humans. A great number of posters and presentations reported on various species of birds and insects. The themes of the conference were: Sensory Pollution, Communication, Social Behaviour, Cognition and Learning, Social Complexity, Personalities, Applied Animal Behaviour, Mating Systems, Sexual Selection, Communication Complexity, Predation and Foraging, Cognition as Foraging, Animal Signals, Development, Parental Care, Perinatal Influences, Female Competition, Genetics and Evolution, Geographic Variation, Ecological Effects, Sensory Neuroecology. The short communications were held in five parallel sessions. Several themes of the conference indicated that research is tapping into more subtle behaviours in individual animals, trying to decipher their sensory systems and cognitive abilities. The invited plenary talks presented social interactions and mating in tropical birds, genes contributing to differences in animal behaviour, epigenetics and variation in behaviour, adaptive behaviour in the cockoo, immunology and behaviour, evolution of reproduction in spiders, cognition in Caledonian ravens, dogs and robots.

More details about the conference (including the poster schedule, talk schedule and the abstracts in pdf format) can be found at [www.indiana.edu/~behav11/](http://www.indiana.edu/~behav11/). It can be accessed through Google (Behavior 2011 Conference).

The second event began in Indianapolis, some 85 km

north of Bloomington. It was the "45th Congress of the International Society for Applied Ethology" (ISAE), July 31 – August 4. Its themes were as follows: Zoo animal behavior, welfare & enrichment, Laboratory animal behavior, welfare & enrichment, Engineering environments & measurement technologies for science and welfare, Pain, distress & humane end-points, and free papers. The Wood-Gush Memorial lecture speaker was S.W. Porges, a well-known neurobiologist of the University of Illinois, who spoke about social behaviour as an adaptation property of the autonomous nervous system. This congress reflected an upsurge in public interest in various issues of animal welfare, the gradual changes in thinking about farm animal housing, especially in the United States and the respective legislation. The society is paying more attention also to zoo, laboratory and companion animal issues. The ways how to enrich the environment, how to measure the behaviour before the actual welfare can be improved. Researchers from various institutions and settings, university teachers, extension personnel, veterinarians shared their expertise to further better understanding of the animal world around us. The program and abstracts can be found at <http://www.applied-ethology.org/>.

The first congress has shown a great diversity of approaches, views and interpretations but its size was overwhelming; to select the lectures among five parallel sections was difficult at times, the technical support for chairpersons could have been better. The book of abstracts was not provided with usual and important information such as its editors, the publisher and there was no ISBN or any other appropriate identification. It is to be hoped that this will be taken care of at the next ABS conference in 2013. Organization of the yearly ISAE congress on the other hand was much easier to handle due to its smaller scale, and a family-like atmosphere. Its topics tend to have a leading theme for each meeting so that the progress in elucidating the questions of interest is easy to follow. The welfare aspects and human-animal interactions always belong to its important topics.

Both conferences have seen a massive presence of very young scientists; this fact is promising a wealth of new insights, enthusiasm and energy into the research of animal behaviour around the globe. A high degree of feminization was remarkable as well. Knowledge presented at these events in behavioural sciences can be of interest also for scientists in countries of the tropical and subtropical regions. Questions of preserving and promoting biodiversity by gaining knowledge of various animal species and their interactions were addressed in an area of science that has seen a rapid development in recent years.

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