MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A welcome to 2012 from the President

It is now already a couple months since we had our 8th International Meeting of the Society of Avian Paleontology and Evolution in Vienna on 11-16 June 2012. Given the relatively austere economic times, we had very good representation from throughout the world and the relatively small meeting ensured all got to meet and discuss projects and make plans for the future together, which after all is the most important outcome from such gatherings. On behalf of the Executive Council, I thank Ursula Göhlich and her helpers Li Ping, Olivier Maridet, Thomas Neubauer, and Peter Sziemer from the Naturhistorisches Museum Wien who organised and gave us a meeting to remember. We also thank Christian Koberl, Director of the NHMW for enabling us to have our meeting in this grand venue which truly is one of the great natural history museums of the world.

Abstracts of the many interesting talks and posters can be found at the SAPE webpage: http://www2.nrm.se/ve/birds/sape/proc001.html.en and you will see there a photograph of the happy delegates. During the conference, the Society had its general meeting during which the Executive Council was elected as follows:

Members at Large: ERIC BUFFETAUT, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, France; JOANNE

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GROUP PICTURE OF THE 2012 MEETING IN VIENNA
Executive Council, we can lead SAPE into a more proactive era. First we must value our members more and towards that end we have now got a keen and active membership team that will ensure members once paid are immediately publicly recognised as such by listing on the Society website. We have already created the means for folk to join our ranks via a simple web-based system. Now, we are investigating ways of upgrading the Society’s website, to increase its usefulness and unsure its long term stability, and if folk have ideas about this we of course welcome all suggestions. In a new initiative, we have established the Cécile Mourer-Chauviré Travel Grant as a first step towards the proactive support of students and other disadvantaged scholars in attending our meetings. Shortly, we will be commencing a campaign to raise funds for this. It was very good to see that quite a number of the attendees in the recent meeting were students and this is a trend we need to ensure is maintained and encourage.

It was a point of discussion among several folk at the recent meeting that 4 years is too long between meetings. The Council agrees with this and we have been discussing ways to improve the situation. Clearly there are numerous competing palaeontological and or neontological forums, so as a first step it seems sensible to join one or two of these in some way. Thus we are looking at having some presence in the upcoming International Ornithological Congress in Japan in 2013, in the form of a SAPE symposium. Council would be keen to hear from members who may be interested in helping run such a symposium and flying the SAPE flag. Secondly, the European Association of Vertebrate Palaeontologists next meeting in France in 2013 is another venue where we can do the same. Eric Buffetaut is investigating the possibilities here for a SAPE presence.

Lastly, I would like to confirm that it is my and our Council’s priority that we ensure SAPE remains relevant to all palaeornithologists and to this end we wish to enhance communication among ourselves, not just among all those interested in avian evolution and its palaeornithological research and an amazing fossil record of birds.

SAPE future
Once again we need to look towards the future of our Society and the role of SAPE in global palaeontology. The previous president was concerned with our role and so am I. Both Luis and I are excited at the prospect that with our new team, namely the Executive Council, we can lead SAPE into a more proactive era. First we must value our members more and towards that end we have now got a keen and active membership team that will ensure members once paid are immediately publicly recognised as such by listing on the Society website. We have already created the means for folk to join our ranks via a simple web-based system. Now, we are investigating ways of upgrading the Society’s website, to increase its usefulness and unsure its long term stability, and if folk have ideas about this we of course welcome all suggestions. In a new initiative, we have established the Cécile Mourer-Chauviré Travel Grant as a first step towards the proactive support of students and other disadvantaged scholars in attending our meetings. Shortly, we will be commencing a campaign to raise funds for this. It was very good to see that quite a number of the attendees in the recent meeting were students and this is a trend we need to ensure is maintained and encourage.

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Lastly, I would like to confirm that it is my and our Council’s priority that we ensure SAPE remains relevant to all palaeornithologists and to this end we wish to enhance communication among ourselves, not just among all those interested in avian evolution and its end points in general. So please, if any folk have any ideas that might be relevant to SAPE we welcome them to contact anyone of the executive council and air their thoughts. We are widespread and hopefully just an email away. In this day and age collaboration, and especially multidisciplinary collaborations are increasingly important. Our small Society of widespread resources gives us a great opportunity in this.

Happy fossil hunting all.
Trevor Worthy

2016 SAPE MEETING IN ARGENTINA

In Vienna, Argentina has been elected as the venue of the next SAPE meeting in 2016. As yet no decision has been made about the exact location, which will be either Buenos Aires, La Plata, or Diamante. The organizing committee consists of Jorge Noriega, Carolina Acosta Hospitaleche, Federico Agnolin, and Marcos Cenizo, and we all look forward to a SAPE meeting in a country with a long history of palaeornithological research and an amazing fossil record of birds.
2013 EVAP MEETING IN NORMANDY

Thanks to the initiative of Eric Buffetaut, there will be a session on avian palaeontology and evolution at the next meeting of the European Association of Vertebrate Paleontologists (EAVP), which will be held in Villers-sur-Mer (Normandy, France) from 11 to 15 June 2013. Eric has discussed the opportunity of having a SAPE-sponsored session on fossil birds with other EAVP board members and the idea has found support. This session could probably take up half a day of the EAVP meeting, i.e., 6 to 7 presentations altogether, plus posters if needed. EAVP meetings have a very broad scope, as they encompass all of vertebrate palaeontology, so a special session on birds should be rather open, too. Further information will be distributed in due course and SAPE members interested in taking part at this meeting should contact Eric or one of the members of the SAPE board.

TREASURERS REPORT AND PAYMENT OF SAPE DUES

The Society has maintained a healthy balance of funds (now £3149.84 or $5000.30) which are now being curated at the University of Southampton. Discussions can now open as to what to do with these funds (see also below).

Note that from now on it is also possible to pay your dues online at the following link:

http://store.southampton.ac.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?modid=1&prodid=759&deptid=46&compid=1&prodvarid=0&catid=75

CÉCILE MOURER-CHAUVIRÉ TRAVEL GRANT

SAPE has the pleasure of announcing a newly established fund – the Cécile Mourer-Chauviré Travel Grant. The fund honors the prestigious career and outstanding dedication to mentoring of Cécile Mourer-Chauviré, SAPE’s first Secretary and one of the Society’s founding members. The scope of this fund is to provide travel aid to graduate students and other disadvantaged scholars presenting papers at SAPE meetings – applicants should contact members of the Executive Council to receive additional information and the application guidelines. Future proceeds from auctions will be allocated within this fund. Nonetheless, those who wish to contribute to this Fund can make specific donations by contacting our Treasurer, Gareth Dyke.

Students are an integral part of our Society. The Executive Council feels strongly about providing financial assistance and increasing the participation of graduate students in future SAPE meetings. We encourage all professional members to contribute the additional funds that will sustain the Cécile Mourer-Chauviré Student Travel Grant and warrant its lasting impact.

NEWS FROM THE MEMBERS AND RECENT PUBLICATIONS

ARGENTINA

FEDERICO AGNOLIN is working on a new phylogenetic analysis of the “terror birds” (Phororhacoidea). This new analysis includes new taxa and characters, and the available evidence is revaluated. This new phylogeny is in press in the Revista del Museo Argentino de Ciencias Naturales. In addition, he is describing new phorusrhacid material from the Miocene of Patagonia. Together with Fernando Novas, he is working on the early origin of birds and just finished a large paper regarding this topic, with the description of new specimens that shed light on the acquisition of flight and derived dinosaur phylogeny. Together with Marcos Cenizo he is describing and interpreting several new avian assemblages from the Neogene of Patagonia and Buenos Aires provinces, including the description of new taxa. Finally, in collaboration with Martin Ezcurra he is working on the Late Mesozoic and Early Tertiary palaeobiogeography of birds, in the light of their new, and recently proposed, palaeobiogeographic scheme.


AUSTRALIA

TREVOR WORTHY is now based at the University of Adelaide, in South Australia. Recent research maintains previous themes with a mixture mainly of projects on the Quaternary and the Early Miocene St Bathans Fauna of New Zealand, and the Australian Neogene. WALTER BOLES has officially retired, but is still will be working on fossil birds in his spare time from the Australian Museum. JACKIE NGUYEN (University of New South Wales, Sydney) continues to investigate the passerines of Riversleigh and NZ St Bathans Fauna for South Wales, Sydney) has officially retired, but is still will be working on fossil birds in his spare time from the Australian Museum. JACKIE NGUYEN (University of New South Wales, Sydney) continues to investigate the passerines of Riversleigh and NZ St Bathans Fauna for South Wales, Sydney)

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AUSTRALIA

ELENA SHUGE (Flinders University, Adelaide) has taken up the challenge of describing Quaternary fossil birds from caves in the Nullabor region of Australia. TRAVIS PARK (Deakin University, Victoria, Australia) and ERICH FITZGERALD (Museum Victoria, Melbourne) have been investigating Pliocene birds from southern Australia.

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Palaeocryptonyx donnenezii Depéret, 1897 (Aves: Phasianidae) with the selection of the lectotype. – Comptes Rendus Palevol, 11: 257-263.


BOEV, Z. (2012): The paleontological locality near the town of Varshets - its scientific importance and potential of tourism. – Varshets Nsp., 7: 3 [in Bulgarian].


BULGARIA

DELPHINE ANGST started her PhD in October 2011 in the University Lyon 2 - Claude Bernard, about the biology of Gastornis Hébert 1855. This project is intended to better understand the paleoecology of this giant ground bird from the Eocene of Europe and North America. It is organized around three principal axes: a classical paleontology study, a geochemical approach and a 3D modeling. The paleontological study is about several new materials from France, comprising a new well preserved mandible from Berru, near Reims (North-East France), and new material including cranial and post cranial material from St Papoul (South France). This work will allow better understanding of the diet, very controverisal now, the type of locomotion, and the body mass, supervised by Eric Buffetaut (CNRS). The geochemical approach has several purposes: the mainly approach is to study the stable isotope of Carbon to determine the diet of Gastornis, and more specifically its trophic level. This analysis is on bones of Gastornis, and on teeth and bones of the animals associated on Gastornis on the different sites in Europe initially and perhaps in North America later. The second analysis is about the Oxygen isotope to study the paleo-climate, and more specifically the paleo-temperature in these sites to better understand the paleo-environment where this bird lived. These studies will be supervised by Christophe Lécuyer and Romain Amiot, in the Geochemical Laboratory in Lyon. The third approach is a 3D study, in particular a Finite Element analysis (FEA) of the new mandible of Gastornis to understand the mechanical proprieties of this bone, both to see the plasticity of the mandible, than know possibilities of mobility of the articular part. This work is in collaboration and supervised by Karen Moreno, from the Universidad Austral de Chile. And another point studied in this PhD is the eggshell found in the Southern France (Var) and reported to Gastornis. The work consist on a synthesis of the very few old papers about it, new studies of the fossil sites, the study on the eggshell ornamentation, and mainly a isotopic analysis of azote to known the diet of this bird.

ERIC BUFFETAUT’s palaeornithological work has concentrated on two main topics: (1) Cretaceous birds, with the description (with D. Angst) of new material of Gargantuavis (a cervical vertebra from the Late Cretaceous of southern France) in Geological Magazine, and the debunking of Samnikuia nessovi, a purported giant bird from Kazakhstan which has turned out ot be based on pterosaur material (in Annales de Paléontologie). Eric has also started to work on an exceptionally well preserved new enantiornithine from the Late Cretaceous of China. (2) Early Tertiary giant birds, mainly in collaboration with Delphine Angst. This includes field work on the localities yielding large eggshell fragments in Provence, investigations about the palaeobiology of Gastornis, and the study of what appears to be a large phorusrhacid bird from the Middle Eocene of France (the so-called Diatryma cotei).
Comparisons of this material with South American forms have been made in collections in Argentina and England.

Antoine Louchart continued to work on diverse aspects of avian teeth and pseudo-teeth evolution, some of the data acquisitions taking more time than initially planned. After a review of avian tooth loss (now published), he is focusing on evo-devo aspects of avian dentitions and pseudo-dentitions, as well as separately on general aspects of avian nomenclature, all topics with publications in prep. Antoine continues in parallel to finalize earlier studies in insular evolution, as well as on fossils from Langebaanweg, for instance. In collaboration with Géraldine Garcia and Patrick Vignaud (Poitiers) a poster on chelonians and archosaurs from the Mio-Pliocene of Chad was presented at the International Symposium on Paleoanthropology in N’Djamena, Chad, 31 October - 1st November 2011. Together, with Albrecht Manegold he continued publishing on fossil birds from Langebaanweg, having started investigations seven years ago for some groups. A description of a new woodpecker from this site is now published, dedicated to Nelson Mandela. Other groups involved other collaborations, including Andrzej Elzanowski on the South African fossil ostriches (in prep.). Other collaborations, especially for the SAPE meeting, concerned fossil Tyto of the Western Paleartic (Marco Pavia, Cécile Mourer), and a review of fossil birds from Langabaanweg with Albrecht. A list of the Corsican fossils in the Naturhistorisches Museum Basel (from Forsyth-Major excavation campaigns) is published in collaboration with Elisabeth Pereira and Sophie Lorenzo (Corsica).

Cécile Mourer-Chauviré thanks the SAPE authorities who decided to dedicate this last meeting and the subsequent proceedings to her. She has been deeply touched by the recognition of her work and of the role she has played in the creation and the first years of existence of the SAPE. She thanks all the persons who have taken part in this meeting for their presence and for their expressions of friendship, and she thanks especially Ursula Göhlich for her work and for the perfect organization of this 8th International Meeting. The setting of Vienna was really magnificent and all the attendants have particularly appreciated the beauty of the city, and all the architectural and cultural masterpieces it contains. Cécile was happy to see that among the participants many young research workers were present and that, in Avian Paleontology, the continuity was thus ensured.

Since the last SAPE newsletter Cécile has worked on the papers that she presented during the meeting, on a small galliform and a very small cuculiform from the late early, or the early middle, Eocene of Tunisia, and on a roller from the classical early Miocene locality of Saint-Gérard-le-Puy, France. She has also submitted a paper for the memorial volume dedicated to Evgeny Kurochkin. This paper is a revision of the genus and species Euronyctibius kurochkini, from the late Eocene of the Senckenberg Museum, Section of Ornithology, and continues studying birds form the Early Pliocene of Langebaanweg, South Africa, some of them in cooperation with Andrzej Elzanowski, Warsaw, Pippa Haarhoff, Langebaanweg, Antoine Louchart, Lyon, and Marco Pavia, Turino. Albrecht is also interested in the phylogeny of extant birds, and a paper dealing with the phylogeny of extant birds, and a paper dealing with the

A paper recently published describes the quadrate of a bird from the earliest Eocene of Australia. At the same time, the authors have studied the quadrate of the Dromornithidae, from the Pleistocene of Australia, and of the genus Sylviornis from the Pleistocene of New Caledonia. They came to the conclusion that the Dromornithidae are palaeognaths and that Sylviornis is an anseriform and certainly not a galliform. In these two families, Dromornithidae and Sylviornithidae, the quadrate is not the only known element. Almost all the elements of the skeleton are known, i.e. the cranium, the maxillary, the pterygoid, the palate, the quadratojugal, the mandible, and the entire post-cranial skeleton. In the case of Sylviornis, none of these elements has been used to see whether it shows the morphological characteristics of the Anseriformes or of the Galliformes. The authors indicate that the quadrate shows similarities with those of some Anseriformes, but also with those of some Galliformes, and shows a character which is unique amongst birds. If the authors had based their study on the palatines, for example, they would have obtained completely different results. When most of the elements of a taxon are known, it is not scientifically sound to base a study on a single element of it, neglecting all the other parts which constitute the whole of this organism.


Germany

Albrecht Manegold holds a fixed-term position at the Senckenberg Museum, Section of Ornithology, and continues studying birds form the Early Pliocene of Langebaanweg, South Africa, some of them in cooperation with Andrzej Elzanowski, Warsaw, Pippa Haarhoff, Langebaanweg, Antoine Louchart, Lyon, and Marco Pavia, Turino. Albrecht is also interested in the phylogeny of extant birds, and a paper dealing with the systematic position of Hemicircus woodpeckers and the evolution of certain adaptations for climbing and drilling in woodpecker birds is currently in press.

Gerald Mayr finished a revision of the diomedeoid bones from the Rupelian of Belgium. Together with Thierry Smith, he currently works on avian remains from the middle Paleocene of China.
EUGEN KESSLER attended the 8th International Meeting of SAPE in Vienna where he presented a poster entitled “On the aquatic origin of birds”. During the year, he continued his work on the remains of passeriforms from the Neogene sites of Polgárdi, Csarnóta and Beremend in Hungary. He published a paper (in two parts) on Miocene avian remains from Northern Hungary, in which he described a number of new species, such as Tadorna minor, Rallidinae (Athene), Galerida cserhatensis, Lullula neogradensis, Praealauda hevesensis, Anthus antecedens, Circlus major, Turdicus minor, Muscicapa leganyii, Enthus nasitzyi, Luscinia praeluscinia, Certhia janossyi, Lanius schreteri, Bombycilla hamori, Sturnus kretzoi, and Emberiza bartkoi.

In the latest years, MARCO PAVIA worked on the Italian Pleistocene, with a particular focus on the locality of Pirro Nord, Southern Italy, where he co-directed the excavation from 2007 to 2009 and where thousands of vertebrate remains have been collected (unfortunately few bird bones). Meanwhile he continued to work on insular avifauna, in particular those from Sicily and Gargano area. The study of the latter one is still in progress, but he plans to end it within the year. More recently, he started to work on Neogene birds as two parrot taxa (Psittaciformes) from the early Pliocene of Langebaanweg (South Africa) and their paleoecological implications. – Ibis.

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NEW ZEALAND

ALAN TENNYSON (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa) has begun writing up some of his Chatham Island fossil research with Jamie Wood (Landcare Research), studying live petrels in Vanuatu, and continuing collaborative work with Paul Scofield (Canterbury Museum) and Trevor Worthy (Adeleida University) on the rich St Bathans Miocene site in Otago.


POLAND

ANDRZEJ ELZANOWSKI is working on ostrich bones, both fossil (from South Africa and Namibia) and extant. PIOTR JADWISZCZAK continues to work on Antarctic fossil penguins, partially in co-operation with Carolina Acosta Hospitaleche, Marcelo Reguero, Andrzej Gażdzicki, Andrzej Tatür and Krzysztof Krajewski. Piotr acknowledges his recent (very fruitful) visit to the Museo delle Alpi della Plata (Argentina), a home to the largest collection of fossil penguins ever. Thanks a lot, Carolina and Marcelo! Two papers have been awaiting publication since the last newsletter and another one is in review.


After the unexpected death of Evgeny Kurochkin in December 2011, Nikita Zelenkov took over the administrative responsibilities concerning fossil birds in the Paleontological Institute of RAS (Moscow). The institute has just created a new administrative unit, “Cabinet of Paleornitology”, with the special aim to develop avian paleontology research. Nikita Zelenkov is currently finishing a catalogue of fossil birds from the territory of the former USSR (a continuation of work initiated by Evgeny Kurochkin), and he is also preparing (together with Alexander Averianov and Walter Bock) a volume in the memory of Evgeny Kurochkin. The volume includes contributions in avian paleontology and is planned to be published as a special issue of Paleontological Journal in the fall of 2013.


Vanessa L. De Pietri will continue with her Post-Doc at the Natural History Museum in Basel, Switzerland, until March 2012. She is currently organizing the fossil bird material housed at the museum, including the vast amount of remains from Saint-Gérard-le-Puy, France. Further projects include CT scanning of several fossil skulls in the collection in collaboration with other researchers.


Estelle Bourdon is finishing her two-year postdoc (Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship) on avian brain evolution at the Natural History Museum London (NHM). Most of the results will be published in 2013.

Joanne Cooper remains the curator of the avian anatomical collections at the Natural History Museum, Tring. Between curatorial duties including preparing specimens and welcoming visitors, she is presently working on assemblages of Pleistocene birds from northern Morocco and Holocene birds from Puerto Rico. Closer to home, she is also helping compile a list of ancient British birds (c.180kaBP – 1800 AD) for
recognition as a formal category of the ‘British List’. Finally, following the recent screening at the Vienna SAPE meeting of time-lapse films of bird skeleton preparation in the NHM beetle colonies, she is pleased to report that they are due to be available by the end of September on both the NHM website: http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/index.html and YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/user/naturalhistorymuseum?feature=results_main.

Julian Pender Hume continues to work on the avifauna of the Mascarene Islands. Work in progress includes a monograph of the Mascarene Sturnidae, with one new species of fossil starling from Mauritius. The Mascarene island of Rodrigues is proving to be more diverse in avifauna than previously realized and a number of new, fossil species have been discovered. This includes a new species of Hypsipetes bulbux. Extant species occur on Mauritius and Réunion, so the Rodrigues taxon fills in the biogeographical gap, with each island once harbouring an endemic species. Comparative analysis of procellariid subfossil remains from Rodrigues Island is also complete, and concludes that an extremely large, now extinct petrel once occurred there. Initial examination of a single proximal humerus of cf. Abbott’s Booby Papasula abbotti has shown that the extirpated Mascarene population of this taxon may warrant specific status. Finally, 2012 saw the publication of Extinct Birds by Julian Hume and Michael Walters, an ambitious project which details the extinction of birds over the last 700 years or more. It includes all species and subspecies known from skins, the fossil record, hypothetical accounts and those that are possibly extinct but data deficient. Also included are doubtful and invalid taxa and species thought extinct, but recently rediscovered. A total of 1057 taxa are covered in the book.


United States

California

In the summer of 2011, the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County inaugurated the museum’s new Dinosaur Hall. It took a big portion of a good number of years of Luis Chiappe’s life (plus a lot of hair loss, if you can believe it!) to curate this two-gallery, 1400 square-meter permanent exhibition. Nonetheless, it was worth it: the exhibition looks beautiful, it received the “Excellence” award from the American Association of Museums (AAM), and hundreds of thousands of people have visited it already. Since then, Luis has resumed much of his research on the Early Cretaceous birds from China, collaborating with a number of Chinese institutions including the Beijing Natural History Museum, the Dalian Natural History Museum, the Capital Normal University in Beijing, and the Xinghai Museum of Prehistory in Dalian. Luis is also editing a scholarly book on the “Paleobiology of Early Birds’ (University of California Press) and writing another book on the avifauna of the Jehol Group (Johns Hopkins University Press). One of his graduate students (Alyssa Bell from the University of Southern California) will defend her Ph. D. dissertation - a revision of the taxonomy and systematics of the Hesperornithiformes - next year. Another of his graduate students (Justin Hall, also from USC) is studying how flight control and performance evolved during the non-avian maniraptoran-neornithine evolutionary transition, and master student Diana Pomeroy (Cal State, Long Beach) is conducting research on sapeornithids.


