

MarBEF Communications & Outreach

By Olive Heffernan

TO REITERATE CARLO Heip’s message from his introduction, we need to raise the profile of bio-diversity on the political front. The G8 Summit has firmly put global climate change on the political agenda. Climate change is happening and global biodiversity is at particular risk. This reinforces the importance of the work we are doing within MarBEF and the urgent need to get our messages into the media and to gain the understanding and interest of the public.

In the past few months, we have successfully established a profile for ourselves among the wider scientific community, through the newsletter, peer-reviewed publications and through our presence at international events. The MarBEF Communications & Outreach Team ran an exhibition booth at the American Society for Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) Summer Meeting at Santiago de Compostela, Spain (19–24 June). The conference, entitled “A global pilgrimage through aquatic sciences” and co-chaired by Carlos Duarte, brought together more than 2,000 international scientists to learn about and discuss emerging issues and the latest developments in aquatic sciences, with biodiversity and ecosystem functioning featuring prominently on the programme. This gave us a perfect opportunity to publicise MarBEF among the international scientific community and inform those interested of our activities and presence at the conference.

In May, MarBEF presented at the BA (British Association for the Advancement of Science) Annual Science Communication Conference at the Royal Society in London. This event brought together scientists, the media and science communicators and was attended by other European NoE representatives. The conference addressed key issues facing science communicators and gave many examples, both practical and theoretical, of communication approaches and strategies that will prove extremely valuable in communicating our messages from MarBEF to researchers, industry, stakeholders, decision-makers and the public. Further details are available from the MarBEF Communication & Outreach Team at outreach@marbef.org. To reach out to the international science communication community, MarBEF will follow this with an exhibition at the “Communicating European Research” 2005 International Conference in Brussels (14–15 November).

The MarBEF Communications & Outreach Team are currently working to reach out to the general public. The next few months will see a huge development of the outreach website, with sections for kids and students due to go online soon. To open our MarBEF Roadshow, we have secured exhibition space at the BA Festival of Science, one of the largest public access celebrations of science in Europe. The festival has an illustrious history with the coining of the word ‘dinosaur’ in 1842 and the famous Huxley-Wilberforce debate in Oxford in 1860. We would like to thank members who have contributed their images for display at this



The MarBEF exhibition booth at the ASLO Summer Meeting in Spain.

event. A full programme of festival events can be found on www.the-ba.net.

While the roadshow opens at the BA festival, it will then travel from there around Europe. It will run from 3-10 September 2005, at the National College of Ireland (www.ncirl.ie), which is located within the Irish Financial Services Centre in the heart of Dublin.

A key task that needs urgent attention in reaching out to the public is the inclusion of marine biodiversity in formal education. Research has shown time and time again that instilling an interest in the environment at an early age is crucial, but education needs to continue throughout the formative years (see article by Nando Boero and colleagues on the museum in Lecce). The next ten years will be pivotal if we, as a society, are to address issues of global change and biodiversity with any efficacy, but we also need to impart these goals and values to the next generation. That is why we are endeavouring, as part of our outreach programme, to review the current inclusion of marine biodiversity issues at primary and secondary school level throughout Europe. We need to know what is being taught if we are to fill in the gaps. At the MarBEF GA in Porto, we addressed the need for school curricula to be translated for each partner country in MarBEF and since then have had great help from some members in the network. However, we still need to complete the review for many countries including the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, France, Belgium and Poland. We need MarBEF members to co-ordinate this task within their own countries as we simply do not have the resources or multilingual capabilities to manage this task on our

own. MarBEF partners can use their outreach budget for this purpose or can apply for funding from the central MarBEF budget where necessary. Further details can be obtained from the MarBEF Communications & Outreach Team at outreach@marbef.org.

For those MarBEF partners leading or involved in a Responsive Mode Project with a dedicated outreach component, the MarBEF Communications & Outreach Team will help to direct and advise on activities and materials where needed. Please contact us to receive guidelines and recommendations and to help devise an outreach strategy specific to your research programme.

A prominent activity in the near future is the set-up of the MarBEF Press Office. This will see all news items and releases being co-ordinated through the Press Office at EcoServe, Dublin, and distributed through a central news distribution service throughout Europe and internationally. In the meantime, all news items and releases will be posted on the main page of the MarBEF website. Please send details of all news items, events and forthcoming publications to outreach@marbef.org for our attention.

• Updates to our programme and events are posted regularly on the MarBEF website. Or contact us directly at outreach@marbef.org.

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MarBEF data management

By Edward Vanden Berghe

Most of the data systems that were planned for MarBEF are operational, and have been reported on in the last newsletter. Progress in providing content for these databases can be followed by monitoring the data directory on the MarBEF website. In this issue of the newsletter, we want to highlight some important developments.

Contact details for all institutes and scientists involved in the MarBEF network have been recorded in our ‘Register of Resources’ – an information system meant to facilitate communication between the partners, containing details of literature, projects and datasets. Keeping this register up to date is a very important task and cannot be done without input from all network partners. We will be reviewing this information very shortly, in collaboration with the Communications and Outreach Team, and will contact all those currently registered, to see if an update is necessary.

Late last year, we had an e-discussion on the MarBEF website in preparation for the data policy; some very relevant documents were provided by Peter Herman and Rainer Froese to set the discussion: a balancing act between the communal benefits of sharing data and the rights of the individual data collector. The resulting draft data policy was discussed and approved in Porto during the second MarBEF general assembly. The text was finalised there and is now available online (<http://www.marbef.org/data/datapolicy.php>). Visitors to the MarBEF data pages are now requested to click a button to indicate that they agree with data policy. A cookie is stored on the user’s computer to avoid asking people the same agreement at each visit to the site.

Much effort has gone into the European Register of Marine Species (ERMS). Most of the taxonomic editors have now been identified, and apart from some groups of the Protoctista and some smaller groups of Crustacea, the whole taxonomic tree is covered. Several of the taxonomic editors have provided feedback on the previous version of ERMS; some make use of the online editing facility, others prefer to provide their input to the data management team, to be entered in the VLIZ offices. Taxonomic groups that have now been revised

are Pisces, Halacaridae, Phoronida, Oligochaeta and Rotifera. We are in communication with several other editors, and hope the revision of the whole taxonomic tree will be finalised in the not-too-distant future.

The content of ERMS has been matched against several other datasets; this brought to light some of the weaknesses of our European register – weaknesses that were, to a large extent, already known. The Protoctista (except the macroalgae) were not included in the scope of the original ERMS EU project and haven’t been dealt with as thoroughly as the other major taxa. Some major groups were even not included at all, like Monera, diatoms and some of the fungal major taxa. Some areas, like the Baltic, harbour a very specific fauna, which hasn’t always been covered in ERMS. Several new taxonomic editors have been identified, and we hope this will enable us to plug the gaps in the existing taxonomic coverage. But, as with any database or reference list, ERMS has to be used: only if ERMS is used, more gaps and errors will become apparent; feedback from the users will be the best long-term guarantee for continuous improvement of the content.

Several other datasets will be stored together with the ERMS information in a single database. The other datasets can either be global lists on a particular taxon, or regional lists. Global lists that are being worked on right now are Porifera, planktonic ostracods and Nemertina – all by European taxonomists and taxonomic editors of ERMS. One non-European regional list has been included so far, the North West Atlantic Register of Marine Species (NWARMS); together with ERMS this will provide one consistent register for the whole of the Northern Atlantic. NWARMS was an initiative of Mark Costello and is now being taken further by Lou van Guelphen of the Huntsman Marine Science Centre in Canada.

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