

The story of the Hydrozoan Society, 1983–2007*

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ABSTRACT: The history of foundation and development of Hydrozoan Society is outlined. The informal references to the most outstanding personalities in modern Hydrozoology are given.

KEY WORDS: Hydrozoa, Hydrozoan Society, history of science.

История Общества гидрозоологов, 1983–2007

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РЕЗЮМЕ: Описана история основания и развития международного Общества гидрозоологов. Даны неформальные характеристики наиболее ярким представителям современной гидрозоологии.

КЛЮЧЕВЫЕ СЛОВА: Hydrozoa, Общество гидрозоологов, история науки.

The beginning; Paul Cornelius has an idea

In the early Eighties I enjoyed the help of one of the most influential Hydrozoan students of those times: Paul Cornelius, of the Natural History Museum of London. I visited Paul in 1982, and he even brought me to pay a visit to Sir Frederick S. Russell, on a memorable day (Fig. 1). I used to send my manuscripts to Paul and he used to slaughter them with sadist pleasure, highlighting all my mistakes, often linked to the Byzantine tendency of us Latins not to explain things with simple and plain words. Paul once wrote me that he was planning to organize an European meeting of hydroid specialists. I proposed to organize a world meeting (why considering just Europe?) and having started

since the beginning of my career to play with life cycles, I proposed Paul to invite also medusan-people, and not only hydroid-people. I went even further, and I said that I would have organized the event in Italy, in Gulf of Naples, at Ischia.

Fabio Cicogna

At the end of Seventies I met Fabio Cicogna, an enthusiast of marine ecology who lived in a beautiful villa at the easternmost end of the gulf of Naples, in front of the Island of Capri. Fabio and I became very close friends and when I told him that I wanted to organize the workshop he

* The publication was inspired by the Russian member of Hydrozoan Society Dr. S.D. Stepanjants



Fig. 1. Sir Frederick Russell (seated, left), Paul Cornelius (standing) and Ferdinando Boero (seated right) in the summer of 1982, at Goring-upon-Thames (picture taken by Fabio Cicogna).

Рис. 1. Сэр Фредерик Рассел (сидит слева), Пол Корнелиус (стоит) и Фердинандо Боэро (сидит справа) летом 1982 г. в Горинге-на-Темзе (фото Фабио Чиконья).

immediately jumped into it and we started to work together. I used to go to scientific meeting, but I was never too satisfied about them. So I said to myself, and to my friends Fabio and Paul, why not organizing a meeting that last two weeks, in a nice place, with no time limits for the talks, no time limits for discussion and with the possibility to go at sea, collect hydroids and medusae and bring them to the lab and play with them? A mixture of a congress with presentations, and research session at a marine laboratory, with all the people that share the same passion for the same animals.

Jean Bouillon

It was not difficult to convince Paul and Fabio, and another enthusiast of the idea was Jean Bouillon (Fig. 2). I met Jean at the Natural History Museum in London, during one of my visits to Paul. Fabio used to accompany me to London, where he had some friends. So, the group was done and we decided to go on with the workshop. The first thing to do was to make a list of possible participants, so to send out letters announcing the workshop. We decided to call it workshop, and not meeting, because we expect-

ed people to actually work together. The list of invitees was easy to compile. All of us were keeping track of all the new papers that were coming out. It was easy, with the Zoological Record and the Biological Abstracts. We had lists of addresses with all the people who had published a paper on hydroids and medusae in the last 15 years or so. We merged our lists and sent the letters. Soon people started to write back, saying that they liked the idea. The only thing to do, then, was to make the workshop happen.

Organizing Ischia

On my return to Italy, at the end of 1983, Fabio and I visited the Ischia Laboratory. It was part of the Zoological Station of Naples. I used to work with the director, Eugenio Fresi, who was starting to work on data treatment in ecology. When I told him that I needed his lab for two weeks he said: OK, take it, and then went on pressing the buttons on his computer keyboard. We calculated that about 30 people might have come and we needed microscopes for them all. The Station had some microscopes, but they were old, and not enough for our pack. Fabio, by chance, was friend with the director of Leitz-Italy, in Milan. He asked him to lend us the state-of-the-art machines for two weeks, both light microscopes and stereomicroscopes. Of course, with at least one with a nice Leica camera on it, with a Polaroid body because we needed to see immediately the result of our work. Fabio's friend said yes. So we had the microscopes. Then he remembered that he had a friend also at Polaroid, so they gave us a whole mountain of paper for immediate prints, and also 30 or so briefcases, to hand out with the material of the meeting. The meeting was also workshop and people were supposed to go in the water. They needed equipment to do so. Fabio had a cousin at Mares, a historical brand of diving equipment near Genova, my hometown. We went visiting his cousin and he "gave" us a mask and a pair of fins for each participant to the workshop. All this is good publicity for you, Fabio used to say. The Zoological Station, on those days, was publishing the last volume of the Fauna and

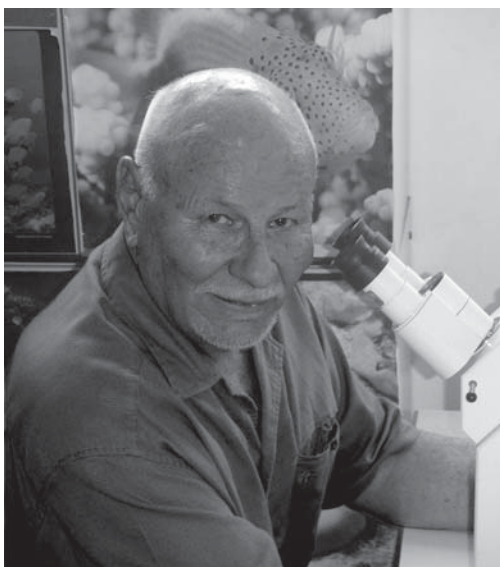


Fig. 2. Jean Bouillon, during a visit to Lecce, in May 2005 (picture taken by Ferdinando Boero).

Рис. 2. Жан Буйон в свой приезд в Лечче в мае 2005 г. (фото Фердинандо Бозро).

Flora of the Gulf of Naples, the Nudibranchs. The volume before that was on the Anthomedusae, authored by Anita Brinckmann-Voss.

I went visiting Groeben, the German-Neapolitan librarian of the Zoological Station. He was a very rough man, used to deal with the outstanding scientists that were so familiar with the Zoological Station in its golden days. I do not know why, but he sort of liked me because he gave me a copy of Anita's book, as a present, and told me that all the people of the workshop would have received one copy as present from the Library of the Station. We sent out some instructions on how to reach Ischia, some names of hotels, and that was it.

The first workshop

People arrived and we started to give them their "presents" or, better: Fabio Cicogna started to give the presents. He behaved like Santa Claus in front of good children. Jeanette Watson refused the mask and fins because she thought that Fabio, like every regular Italian, was trying to sell her things that she did not need (she had her diving equipment with her). Then she discovered

that all those things were for free, and so she took them, still expecting some trick, thought.

For me all those people were their papers, and I used to ask question to these people. Reading their papers was like talking to them. Many of my favorites "papers" were there. To consult Vervoort I did not have to take his papers, I had Vervoort in person to consult. And Bouillon, and Cornelius, and Goy, Yamada, Mergner, Gravier-Bonnet, Arai, Mills, Benovic, Kubota, Hughes, Ostman, Christensen. Plus a bunch of young people that were just starting, just like me. Cairns, Gili, Pagès, Garcia Rubies, Jarms, Bavestrello, Castello i Tortella, Bender, and Piraino, and a group of students that I brought from Genova, to help. Some attendants passed by for a few days, like Leo Buss and Phil Yund, Lucia Rossi, and R. Hartwick, who told us about Cubozoans in Australia. All those people knew each other from their correspondence but never had an occasion to get together as a group: they immediately became friends. Of course I made the smart-ass for the whole meeting, asking questions to each and every talk, making comments, pretending to know everything. Almost all the people in there knew much more than I did, but they were very patient with me. The most patient one was Jean Bouillon and, after Ischia, we went to "his" island in Papua New Guinea for three long periods.

The program was very diluted. The number of talks was small and there were no time limits. People were very relaxed and delivered their talks not really as formal talks, but as if they were telling their friends what they had been doing in their field of work in the last five years. During the workshop we decided to found the Hydrozoan Zoologists Association (HZA) as we elected its President. The most logical choice was Bouillon, who we considered as the president of the meeting. But Jean does not like such things. He likes to work with his animals. The choice, then, fell on Fabio Cicogna. Then it was decided to elect also a secretary and the choice fell on me. Once the workshop was finished we had to publish the proceedings. The person who started all this, the one who proposed to have a hydroid meeting for Europeans, Paul Cornelius,

had some friends too, at Oxford University Press. He convinced them that it would have been wise to publish a book out of the proceedings of the workshop. Paul did the editing of all the papers, correcting the English of all contributors, even of those who had English as his first language! It took almost two years to have the book published: the workshop was held in 1985 (last week of September and first week of October) and the book came out in 1987. Meanwhile, Shin Kubota offered to take care of a newsletter containing relevant information about the Hydrozoan Zoologist's Association, especially reporting on new papers that were coming out, or on where to find old monographs, or translations of papers that were not in English. With this initiative, Shin became extremely important in keeping the links among members.

Villefranche-sur-Mer

Fabio and I started immediately to think about the second workshop. Jaqueline Goy and the Carrées offered Villefranche-sur-Mer. The Marine Station at Villefranche-sur-Mer is a dream. An historical building, right on the sea, with outstanding location and outstanding equipment. Perfect! Even better than Ischia! Nice place, nice people, nice food, nice everything. Unfortunately, however, the local organizers had problems with their administrations, and started to postpone the meeting year after year. We consulted Jean Bouillon, as always, and he advised to stop with Villefranche and try another place.

Blanes

At this point Joseph-Maria Gili made his offer. There is a laboratory of theoretical biology at Blanes, not very far from the sea, where he might have organized the workshop. So we decided that Blanes was OK, and we were right, because Blanes was as successful as Ischia. Again, the president of the meeting was Jean Bouillon. He had to open the congress with a speech. I still remember that memorable event. We were in a canteen, with lots of cava (the sparkling wine produced in Catalonia), having

fun just from being together, and somebody started to ask for a speech from our president. The speech was short. Jean said: welcome! The hard core fanatics of hydrozoans showed up again also at Blanes, with some new entries. Some were really remarkable, like Alexander Antsulevitch from Leningrad. He gave me a head of Lenin, that I still treasure, in bronze. Another remarkable person was Volker Schmid. Volker is German Swiss. Extremely precise. He is an experimental person, used to work in the laboratory but also a lover of outdoor work. Volker gave a presentation on his experiments on transdifferentiation, explaining that cells can de-differentiate and re-differentiate into some other cell type. He also showed that medusan tissues, in medusa buds, can even go back to polyp organization, but that, at a given point in development, the cells become too committed and cannot go back again. After that presentation it was the turn of Giorgio Bavestrello. Giorgio was my first student, and I immediately urged him to study life cycles. He found *Turritopsis nutricula* (now *T. dornanii*) and obtained the new-born medusae from the hydroid.

Giorgio forgot about the medusae in their little vessels. When he came back to them, he found little polyps on the bottom of the jars, where the water was almost gone, salinity was high and so was temperature. The little jellies had gone back to the state of polyps. Giorgio repeated the observations with planned carelessness, and had the same result. Stressed medusae can go back to polyp. Volker was listening to Giorgio with a very skeptical look. "Impossible"? he said. I have done my experiments very carefully and I have seen that this is not what happens. Volker worked with *Hydractinia carnea*, a different model animal, but he refused to believe. I went for a swim along the coast of Blanes and I found *Turritopsis*. I came back to the lab with some colonies with medusa buds. On the very same day the medusae were liberated and in 24 hours, after some stress in the jars (high temperature) they were polyps! This happened under Volker eyes! Now he believed. Piraino helped to do these things and, since Bavestrello was starting to work also at sponges

and had no time to follow this problem, Volker and Stefano started to explore this phenomenon together and a scientific project is still going on.

The workshop took place from the 15th to the 27th of September 1991. The proceedings were published by the journal *Scientia Marina*, a choice made possible by J.M. Gili, who was the editor in chief. Gili was going to become a key person in the Society. Paul Cornelius devoted so much effort to the editing of the Ischia volume that he asked to skip a turn, and the choice fell on Rob Hughes. Rob is an ecologist, just as the people from Barcelona, and their affinities built a strong link. Gili was a pupil of Ramon Margalef, one of the most influential ecologists of all times. He asked Ramon to come over a Blanes and give us a talk, and he came. We spent the day with him. This is our workshop: the introductory talk is made of one word. The program can be modified at the very last minute. At that workshop, the Hydrozoan Zoologists Society became the Hydrozoan Society and we decided that the next meeting would have been in Roscoff, where Jean Bouillon (the soul of the Hydrozoan Society) had lots of friends.

Roscoff

We missed France, after the attempt at Villefranche-sur-Mer, but we wanted France at all costs. So we went on the Atlantic. The Station of Roscoff is as historical as Villefranche. It is the Station that was headed by Georges Teissier for a very long time, the place where meiofauna was studied almost for the first time. Bouillon had very good connections there, and we were given the station with no problem. A laboratory, with water tables and microscopes, that became also a conference room, nice access to the shore, dormitories, a cafeteria. One cannot ask for more. At Roscoff also Pierre Tardent came, and lots of Russian Scientists, Sofia Stepanjants, Dimitry Orlov, and, of course, our old friend Alexander Antsulevitch. Volker brought some of his old students, like Suzanne Reber Muller. New entries were also Cinzia Gravili, and several others. The talks were all interesting, as usually, there is no way to be bored at the

workshop of the Hydrozoan Society! Discussions continued at bars and cafeterias. I remember a memorable one between Volker and Jean, about hydrozoan histology. Fabio Cicogna did not come to Roscoff, he started to have health problems. I decided that it was not right for me to continue to be secretary without a president and so I resigned. The choice fell on Joseph Maria Gili as president and Rob Hughes as secretary. Well, the choice might have fallen on Paul Cornelius, but Paul was “invited” to change group of expertise in his Museum: he had to quit the Hydrozoans and switch to something “more interesting”: Scyphozoa. He did, of course, but this put him out of our group.

Gili offered *Scientia Marina* to publish the proceedings of Roscoff and the usual group, plus Stefano Piraino, took care of the reviewing process and of the production of the volume. There was something strange going on in the UK at those times, because after having been elected Secretary, Rob did not show up any more, and completely disappeared, at least in person. I learnt from Gili that he was given an enormous teaching load and had almost no time to do research. The two most eminent British specialists of the Hydrozoa of that period were more or less pushed out of that business. It was the first time that the UK had no Hydrozoan specialist since when Ellis published the book that started in all, in 1755.

Bodega Bay

The years were passing, and nothing was happening. So I decided that, in spite of not having any official role any more, I had to do something and wrote to administration of the Bodega Marine Laboratory, the place where I spent half of 1983 and asked to organize the workshop there. They said: “Yes”. I had to find a local contact. My choice fell on Claudia Mills, based at Friday Harbor, north of Bodega Bay, in Washington State. Many people came, and we had the usual fun. We collected hydroids at low tide, Paul Siri, the vice-director of the Lab, organized dredgings, we had lots of animals. Many people from the US came, like John Rees,

who made his PhD on the Hydrozoa of Bodega Bay and many others. The South Americans arrived, and especially the Brazilians, headed by Alvaro Migotto. They produced high standard work, and Alvaro was invited to co-edit the proceedings of the workshop, together with Claudia, Josep Maria and myself. Too many new names were at that meeting. I was impressed by Bernd Shierwater, a gigantic German who took his Ph.D at Yale, with Leo Buss. Bernd smokes the cigar, speaks with a very powerful voice and seems always ready to kill somebody. Then you know him, and he proves a very sweet person. Unfortunately Jean Bouillon did not come. He started to be sick and had retired. He was not lost to our community, though. He is still the most active person in our business in terms of published papers and monographs. Shin Kubota, a constant presence at the workshop, informed that he was not able to continue to produce the newsletter. The internet revolution had started by then, so we decided that we might launch a web page. One of the many US researches that passed by to attend the workshop, Allen Collins, raised his hand and said: "I can do it". The day after the web page of the Hydrozoan Society was in the web. A special US person was Cliff Cunningham. He came to the workshop and decided there to apply for a PEET project. The National Science Foundation had realized that the US were losing taxonomic expertise, and so launched the Partnership to Enhance Expertise in Taxonomy. To get PEET money you have to enhance something that is disappearing (taxonomic expertise), but if that expertise is disappearing, who is going to apply? Cliff was not a naturalist. So he was worried not to be the right person for such a project. The workshop convinced him and the PEET project on the Hydrozoa was conceived at Bodega Bay. Bodega was very fruitful and we left with the feeling that great times were ahead of us. And they were mostly because of the PEET.

South Africa

Emanuele Buecher attended the Bodega Bay meeting and evidently liked the Hydrozoan Society because, after a while, she proposed to

organize the workshop in South Africa, where she had moved after having made her thesis at Villefranche-sur-Mer. The fifth workshop of the Hydrozoan Society was held in the austral summer, at Langebaan, South Africa, from 7 to 17 January 2003. Unfortunately no book was published out of that workshop and so only the personal memories remain of it.

An introduction to the Hydrozoa

Jean Bouillon has a prodigious knowledge of Hydrozoa and likes very much to put it on paper. He decided that it would have been worth while to write a complete introduction to the Hydrozoa. It took years to finish a monograph that comprised also the list of all the nominal species of Hydrozoa of the world, with diagnoses of all supra-specific taxa. It was published by the Memoirs of the Paris Museum of Natural History. We co-authors (Pagés, Gili, Gravili, and Boero) had the chance of being associated with it due to the existence of the Hydrozoan Society and even if it is not a volume of workshop proceedings, the monograph is surely a product of the Hydrozoan Society. This group of authors, together with Dolores Medel, had published in 2004 the illustrated monograph on the Hydrozoa of the Mediterranean Sea.

Plymouth

It was my intention to organize something for the 20th anniversary of the Hydrozoan Society, in 2005. By then I met Steve Hawkins, the director of the Marine Biological Association and of its Plymouth Laboratory, the Lab directed for so many years by Sir Frederick Russell. Gili appointed his best hydrozoan friend and collaborator to follow the practical issues linked to the organization of this event, and Francesc Pagés contacted Elaine Robson and they set up the workshop, with the usual help from their friends. The history is over. A few weeks before the workshop, on May 5 2007, Francesc passed away. It was a shock to our community. Fabio Cicogna, our first president, died in July 2004, but he was almost 80, and had a wonderful and

long life, full of satisfaction. Francesc had his life ahead. The Plymouth workshop, a very successful one, was HIS workshop.

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