

Carta al editor

The International Federation of Mammalogists: What is it and what does it do?

The IFM is a federation of organizations from throughout the world that serves “to promote international cooperation and understanding in the science of mammalogy.” All scientists interested in research on mammals should therefore know about this organization, and support it when opportunities arise. It is there for you and for humanity generally. More specifically, the Federation encourages: 1) international collaboration in efforts for conservation of mammals and their habitats; 2) research on mammals; 3) preservation of mammal collections; 4) the computerization of collection data; 5) exchange of students, data, and specimens; 6) promotion of a stable and evolutionary based nomenclature; 7) issuance of collecting and specimen export permits to scientists; and 8) any other activity that promotes our knowledge and understanding of the Earth’s mammalian fauna.

Perhaps the Federation is best known for its organization of the International Mammalogical Congresses (IMCs). These are held every four years, and have attracted from 600 to almost 2000 attendees. The last one was held in August 2009 in Mendoza, Argentina, and the next is scheduled for August 2013 in Belfast, Northern Ireland. In 1997 the congress was held in Acapulco, Mexico. This series of conferences was founded in 1974 with the first one being held in Moscow, USSR. The congresses were known originally as the International Theriological Congresses (ITCs), and were organized by the Steering Committee for the Section of Mammalogy (Theriology) within the International Union of Biological Sciences (IUBS). The launching of this effort in international cooperation was a major contribution to breaking down the scientific, cultural, and personal communication barriers then prevalent between the Soviet block countries and most of the rest of the world (the “Iron Curtain”). Because of severe travel restrictions in the Soviet block, the only way to get this program started was to have the first congress in Moscow. The second one was in Brno, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). After that we moved outside of the Iron Curtain, and have already met at least once in all of the world’s inhabited continents. Our “cold war” beginnings meant that the Steering Committee was structured around major political blocks, such as South America or East Europe. Committee representation was based on these large blocks of countries (originally 8, later increased to 11), but there was no workable mechanism specified in our bylaws for how the representatives were to be chosen. As time went on, this arrangement became progressively less and less effective. At the 8th congress in South Africa in 2001, we decided to change the name of the congresses from ITC to IMC.

In 2006 we completely reorganized the ITC Steering Committee to form the Federation that we have currently. Membership is now composed of professional organizations devoted to the science of mammalogy (theriology). We remain under the sponsorship of IUBS. The new organizational structure allows us to do much more than just put on congresses. We now have elected officers, a Board of Directors, 4 standing committees, one ad hoc committee, and a small bank account. The Board consists of representatives from each member society, of which we now have 16. Societies are allowed one representative for each 1000 members. The representative for the Asociación

Mexicana de Mastozoología is Víctor Sánchez-Cordero. The standing committees are: Conservation, Systematic Collections, Nomenclature, and Historian/Archivist. The single ad hoc committee is named Future Directions; it is our “think tank.” Membership on these committees is drawn from the world community of mammalogists. All of this structure assures much better continuity between congresses, and also allows us to keep pursuing our goals continuously. The world’s mammalogists are also much more effectively and democratically represented in this new and improved world body. In the past we have donated funds to provide some support for graduate students to attend the congresses, and we anticipate supporting at least one plenary speaker at future meetings. We hope to be able to do much more.

To learn more about the Federation and its activities, please visit our web site (www.mammalogyinternational.org). Here you will also find contact information for officers, members of the Board of Directors, our webmaster (Ticul Álvarez-Castañeda), and for various mammalogical organizations including some that are not members of the Federation.

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