

No gnomes spotted on this trip to Zurich

Gnomes were not on the agenda, but virtually every type of four or six-legged urban pest came-up in debate at the 8th International Conference on Urban Pests (ICUP), held between 20-23 July in Zurich, Switzerland. *Pest* editor, Frances McKim, reports.

Held only once every three years, ICUP events are like no other. A lack of commercialism being one feature. Organised by individuals very much on a voluntary basis, the aim is simply to cover its costs. This means there is no money-making exhibition to pound around and few marketing and sales delegates promoting their products. Not surprisingly, there is sponsorship from some of the leading companies, but this is relatively low key.

So what is there?

For three days over 280 individuals from 32 different countries from right across the globe had the chance to listen to more than 60 presentations, attend participative workshops and visit a poster session on virtually every urban pest possible.

But the formal talks are only a small part – what is unique is the opportunity to meet, mingle and debate with all those present. This formulae is obviously popular, as in the opening session



Overarching organisers, Bill Robinson, left, and Clive Boase with Zurich chairman, Gabi Müller

Bill Robinson from the USA, one of the two individuals who makes these events happen (the other being our own Clive Boase) asked for a show of hands as to

who had attended an ICUP event before – there were very few hands not raised. In fact, several delegates had attended all seven of the previous events over a 21 year time-frame. But this does not mean ICUP is attended by rapidly advancing 'pest has-beens', as the organisers go out of their way to attract a new, up-and-coming audience, with generous registration concessions for students.

Chairman of the organising committee this year was the charming Gabi Müller from the health and hygiene department of the City of Zurich. Carrying the torch forward to the 2017 event is Matthew Davies, technical advisor for Killgerm Chemicals, meaning the 9th ICUP is to be held somewhere in the UK.

Whilst the range of pests covered at the conference was extensive, some pests in particular featured more strongly – mosquitoes, ants and, hardly surprisingly, bed bugs.

21 years of ICUP

In the opening plenary session, Dr Reiner Pospischil who was part of the organising committee, presented an excellent resume of the 21 year history of ICUP (having originally started as the International Conference on Insect Pests in the Urban Environment – ICIPIUE – but with a subtle name change to its current form in 1999 to accommodate more than just insects!) and the development of urban pest management over these years.



Mini Swiss cow bells were used to summon delegates to the sessions





Pest editor Frances McKim (centre) with Dini Miller (right) and Molly Stedfast both from Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, USA

A staggering statistic we are all inclined to forget is, that in 1800 less than 2% of the world's population (and there were far fewer of us too) lived within urban areas. By 1950 this had grown to 28% and by 2050 it is projected this will have risen to 69%. Add to this the challenge of climate change, faster and growing world trade and the decrease in global travel times, and you do start to appreciate the new opportunities we present to pests – both in quantity terms and also in terms of the introduction of alien species.

Industry has not stood still

But as an industry we have not stood still. Over this 21 year time-frame there has been the development of monitoring devices which can detect specific compounds emitted by pests, detection kits for frequently used insecticides, detection of allergens associated with the more common household pests (cockroaches and house dust-mites for example), the use of impregnated nets for insects other than mosquitoes, electric barriers to stop invaders including rodents and, most recently, the implementation of nanotechnology in pest management. Regulatory restrictions may be depleting the range of chemicals used, but how they are delivered has radically changed – take the development of cockroach gels as an example.

All is not totally rosy though, as what Dr Pospischil failed to mention was the rise in insect and, in particular, rodent resistance over this period. He concluded by saying: "A world without pests will never be achieved. Pest management will be an important task in the future." Music to the ears of those present!

Lack of standards

A noticeable theme which ran through several of the presentations was one of standards – or to be precise – a lack of standards. On the management front, Roland Higgins and Frederic Verwilghen outlined what is happening within Europe to create a recognised professional pest control operating standard – see page 8 – but a lack of recognised scientific testing standards was also bemoaned.

Over these 21 years, problems with bed bugs have risen out of all proportion. As a response the quantity of scientific research has radically expanded, this having been a pest which previously attracted little attention and where here was even less practical experience in the field.

In their bed bug presentations, both Drs Michael Potter and Dini Miller from the USA detailed how our knowledge base had grown, but they said we are still a long way off conquering this pest. And international delegates may well have viewed their flights home in a different light following Adam Juson's scary presentation relating to bed bugs on aircraft – see pages 28 & 29.



Networking is an important part of the ICUP experience

All this research may have been going-on with bed bugs, but from the presentations it became clear that there is a lack of any sort of universally recognised testing protocol. Never one to mince his words, Stephen Doggett from the Department of Medical Entomology at Westmead Hospital, Australia brought this debate to a head in one of the workshops. He started-off by asking how bed bugs had made it onto product labels – was this a matter of history when the recommendations were drawn-up years ago?

Today, when companies are testing for efficacy, what sort of bed bug strain do they test on – susceptible or resistant? How are resistant strains defined? What procedures are used to undertake the tests? With no 'standard' these requirements are open to interpretation. Those present in the workshop struggled with answers. This is surely a topic we will hear more about.

Plenty of UK presentations

Although delegates from the UK were a little lacking, there were several presentations covering UK work. Joanne Fozzard, representing NPAP, detailed their research into pest control within local authorities (as she had done at PestEx 2013) and also outlined the scope of the new National Environmental Health Board (see page 4). Dave Oldbury, also with an NPAP hat on, detailed the organisation's work in sewers, Clive Boase (the Pest Management Consultancy) spoke about the problems at Hidcote Manor caused by the invasive ant species *Lasius neglectus* (see **Pest** issue 21) and Matthew Davies (Killgerm) presented his work on house flies in hospitals. Finally, Dave Hammond of Thermokil outlined the principles of heat treatment whilst Robert Child of Historyonics spoke about wood boring insects.

All in all an excellent event. Don't forget about it in three years time!



From the UK, Killgerm's Moray Anderson, Matthew Davies, Joanne Fozzard (representing NPAP) and Sabre Fearon with Dave Oldbury (NPAP) and Adam Juson, Merlin Environmental