

Report on the 2nd PhytoPal Workshop

Sciences de la Terre, Building SN5, Université des Sciences et Technologies de Lille



Delegates (from left to right). Marco Vecoli, Dick Aldridge, Ken Dorning, Emmanuelle Javaux, Thomas Servais, Cristiana Ribecai, Stewart Molyneux, Malgorzata Moczydlowska-Vidal, Paul Strother, Elena Raevskaya and Gary Mullins.

Wednesday 15th December 2004 Management Meeting

Attended by Dick Aldridge, Ken Dorning, Malgorzata Moczydlowska-Vidal, Stewart Molyneux, Gary Mullins and Thomas Servais. Apologies were received from Alain Le Hérisse and Reed Wicander.

St. Louis Meeting

It was decided to produce a definitive curve of microphytoplankton diversity through the Late Precambrian to the Triassic in time for the St. Louis AASP meeting, September 18th-21st, 2005*. A management meeting will take place before the phytoPal session and a further meeting to evaluate feedback will take place after the session.

*Reed has requested that the phytoPal session take place for one half day on the morning of Tuesday 20th September.

Problems associated with production of the curve were highlighted as follows:

- The current diversity of the Ediacaran Period in the database is overestimated and needs to be reassessed.

- At present only about 6% of the database has been checked and the records of 4952 taxa have yet to be examined.
- The nomenclature used in the Cambrian is not yet stable and may cause difficulties.
- There may be problems with dating units that use an old terminology.
- The number of studies in each area of the stratigraphical column and palaeogeographical region need to be assessed. Similar problems were encountered in the recent studies on the diversity of microphytoplankton in the Ordovician, where “diversity” was found to reflect the amount of work undertaken and the palaeogeographical areas examined.
- If sufficient funds were available, financial assistance to attend the St. Louis meeting would be offered to non-partners who had supported the phytoPal project.

Exchange visits

- Gary would visit Malgosia in mid June 2005.
- Thomas Servais would provisionally visit Leicester and the British Geological Survey in February–March 2005.
- The programme of exchange visits between the remaining partners would be confirmed.
- The possibility of enabling researchers who were not originally named as partners in the project, but who intend to make a substantial input, to undertake exchange visits would be explored with the Leverhulme Trust.

Future funding

The possibility of future funding of the phytoPal project was examined. The Linnean Society provides small grants of up to £1500 to promote systematic research. The European Union was a possibility and Ken Dorning would undertake preliminary work to examine the options available. NATO provides facilities for exchange visits and Dick Aldridge would assess the possibility of funding. The IGCP now also includes climate related projects and could provide money to enable researchers to visit each other. Thomas Servais would examine the possibilities. Gary Mullins would examine the possibility of applying to bodies that promote the maintenance of databases.

Presentation of results at future meetings

After the final funded meeting in St. Louis, the results of the phytoPal project could also be presented at the June 2006 International Paleontological Congress in Beijing, the December 2005 Palaeontological Association meeting in Oxford, UK, and the 2006 CIMP meeting in Prague. It was further suggested that results could be presented at the IGCP 503 meetings in Milwaukee (2005) and Glasgow (2006).

Other business

- The phytoPal database could be linked to Chronos (<http://www.chronos.org/>), which is “an interactive network of data and tools for Earth system history.”
- It was noted that the email discussion group (phytopal@le.ac.uk) has seen little traffic.