SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

A New Voice for European Scientists?

STRASBOURG, FRANCE—About a year ago, a dozen European scientists identified something they saw to be missing in the European research scene: an organization to act as a voice for working researchers across the continent. "European scientists of all disciplines do not have a common means to express themselves, or a place where they can interact with other elements of society," says astronomer Françoise Praderie of the Paris Observatory. Last weekend at a constituent assembly of 200 "founding members" here, that vacuum was transformed into "Euroscience," an association of scientists and "citizens concerned about science and technology," says Claude Kordon of the French biomedical research institute INSERM.

The instigators of Euroscience, who include Praderie, Kordon, Rémy Lestienne of the Institut des Neurosciences in Paris, and mathematician Jean-Pierre Bourguignon, director of the Institut des Hautes Etudes Scientifiques in Bures-sur-Yvette, had laid the groundwork by writing to 250 prominent European scientists, asking for their support. Those who responded were invited to the meeting to launch the organization and hammer out its bylaws. They also discussed how Euroscience should pursue its goals, which Kordon defined last week as "a better integration of science in our culture, addressing societal demands in a more research-friendly way, and making science more culture friendly."

The organizers are unabashed in their use of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS, *Science*'s publisher) as a model. Bourguignon, for example, says that at the AAAS meeting in San Francisco in 1994, he "was very impressed by the content, diversity, and wide variety of the topics discussed." Although Euroscience has no plans for a similar meeting at the moment, attendees did discuss the possibility of following AAAS's lead and setting up a journal, in electronic and in paper form, but this will require substantial funding, says Praderie.

The founding members also set up three working groups to look at particular problems and compile reports. One will deal with the future of young scientists in Europe as academic jobs dwindle. "Seventy percent of physics students will not go into a physics profession," said physicist John Finney of University College London. A second working group was charged with strengthening scientific collaboration with central and Eastern European countries, while the third will consider how to make science more accountable to "European society, industry, and other societal demands"—by making it easier for scientists to switch between academic and industrial jobs, for example.

But the hottest debate at the meeting was reserved for how Euroscience would find a niche among all the other organizations seeking to represent the interests of European science. Bruno Schmitz, a science adviser at the European Commission, the European Union's executive body in Brussels, said he cannot see much of a role for Euroscience, given the existing bodies already providing science advice in Brussels, such as the European Science and Technology Assembly and the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee. But Kordon says the new organization "will not compete with the existing institutions, but try to cooperate synergistically with them."

Whatever its role, Euroscience will need more members to have any real influence. "We hope for 1000 members by our next general assembly in December this year, and 5000 members 2 years later," says Bourguignon. (Membership currently costs $80 per year.) It also needs a governing board, which members will vote on in a few weeks. And some delegates think the organization's program needs to be defined better as well. "We need to focus on a few of the topics discussed and come up with some swift action," says Peter Gahan of London's King's College.

Still, Kordon is happy with this first step. The idea of Euroscience "sounded like a dream rather than a realistic concept. ... But the response has been greater than we had hoped for."

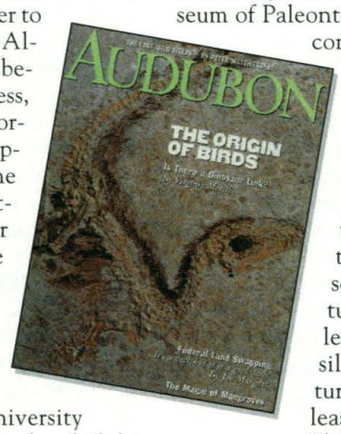
–Alexander Hellemans

Alexander Hellemans is a writer in Paris.

PALEONTOLOGY

Feathered Dino Wins a Few Friends

When Chinese paleontologists claimed last fall to have discovered a fossil of a dinosaur with a mane of downy feathers, the evidence seemed light as a feather to many Western scientists. Although the fossil quickly became a hot item in the press, there was no manuscript or formal presentation—only snapshots passed around in the hallways of a scientific meeting (*Science*, 1 November 1996, p. 720). Doubts were inevitable, given the heated debate about whether birds originated from dinosaurs or have deeper evolutionary roots. One ornithologist, Alan Feduccia of the University of North Carolina, even wondered if this were the "Piltdown Dino," referring to the notorious false fossil of a missing link between humans and apes.



But now it seems that the fossil and its fringe are being taken seriously, as reports from those who have seen it make the rounds. "They look very much like feathers," says American Museum of Natural History bird paleontologist Luis Chiappe, who saw the fossil in Beijing last month with colleague and dinosaur expert Mark Norell. Chinese scientists are still a long way from convincing skeptics, who say the fiberlike structures could be scales, a frill, hair, or even squashed guts. But Chen Peiji of the Nanjing Paleontology Institute is revising a manuscript on the find for *Nature*, the editors of which have asked for changes before deciding whether to publish it, says Philip Currie of the Tyrell Museum of Paleontology in Canada, who has consulted with Peiji.

The 121-million-year-old fossil, found last summer by a farmer in China's rural Liaoning Province, was sold in two parts to rival institutes—the Nanjing Institute and the Chinese Geology Museum in Beijing. Each institute has since acquired at least one more dinosaur fossil with featherlike structures, bringing the total to at least three individuals, say Chiappe and Currie. The only publication on these fossils so far has been in Chinese in the journal *Chinese Geology*, by Ji Qiang, director of the Chinese Geology Museum in Beijing.

Those who haven't been to China can look at the cover of the March/April issue of *Audubon*, which shows the fossil in detail. Still, University of Kansas paleontologist Larry Martin thinks the "feathers" in the photos look like a frill on a marine iguana. But he too wants to see the fossil for himself. He and three other experts left for China Monday. "I'm going to be absolutely shocked if I see anything that looks like a feather," he says. Feathers may fly when the team returns—on April Fools' Day.

–Ann Gibbons