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Formation of the Aquatic Insects Subsection, ESA

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The late Robert L. Usinger, in his popular book "Aquatic Insects of California," reminded us that aquatic entomology is a large and diverse field, pursued by persons with quite unrelated interests and objectives. With this in mind, it is appropriate that an organized Subsection has evolved over the past several years within ESA to accommodate professional and interested aquatic entomologists.

Submitted paper sessions and symposia now provide a common meeting ground for participants at annual meetings, and an annual newsletter from the Subsection Secretary informs members of upcoming meetings of interest, subsection business and major developments relating to aquatic insects. At the urging of several members, and in hopes that documentation may be useful when a history of aquatic entomology is eventually written, I have undertaken to herein relate events during the decade 1966–76 that led to formalization of our active subsection.

To my knowledge, the first organized assemblage of aquatic entomologists under the auspices of ESA was a symposium and submitted papers session at the 1966 Portland, Oregon meeting. Those sessions were organized and moderated by N. H. Anderson, Oregon State University, at the request of his colleague K. G. Swenson, the Chairman of Section C. The response and enthusiasm generated at those meetings resulted in an exciting exchange of ideas, and there were standing room only audiences for both invited speakers and submitted papers. I thought at the time that the sessions were so well organized and stimulating, one might suppose this had been a long-standing group; certainly further such exchanges should be encouraged. Topics and invited speakers for that first symposium were: "Aquatic Insects and Ecological Problems," H. H. Ross, "Trichoptera: Immature Stages and Why," G. B. Wiggins, "Chironomid Epizootics, Interpretation of their Causes and Declines," E. C. Bay, "Studies on the Aquatic Stages of the Ephemeroptera," G. F. Edmunds Jr., and "Summary," the late J. W. Leonard. Clifford Johnson was listed as a speaker, but because of illness he could not come.

R. L. Usinger, President of ESA in 1966, was sympathetic to continuation of aquatic sessions, and asked N. H. Anderson to again organize the group for the 1967 meetings in New York. Norm Anderson circulated 2 form letters notifying all those who signed a mailing list in 1966 that sessions were planned, and requesting suggestions on topics or themes and preferred times. The symposium title decided upon was "Micro-distribution of Aquatic Insects" to be moderated by R. L. Usinger. In November, 1967, Bob Usinger was hospitalized with the illness that lead to his death. In his absence, N. H. Anderson moderated the symposium and Gordon Guyer gave concluding remarks.

Topics and speakers for that 2nd symposium were: "Trophic Structure as Related to Micro-distribution," K. W. Cummins, "Niche Segregation as Expressed in the Odonata," C. Johnson, "Drought-induced Changes in Microdistribution and Population Structure," S. W. Hitchcock and "The Occurrence of Stream Invertebrates Deep in the Substratum," H. B. N. Hynes and M. Coleman.

The mixup in scheduling of aquatic submitted papers at the New York meeting provided one of the initial stimuli for organizing a subsection. Some were scheduled in Section C on Wednesday, instead of after the symposium on Monday, and others were scattered in Sections A and E. An informal business meeting, or as N. H. Anderson puts it, a "bull session," was held after the symposium with a pros and cons discussion of formalizing the group. No one at that time wanted to take the initiative to develop a section, sub-section etc., so it was decided to continue on a year-to-year basis.

In years that followed the formalization dream and exchange of ideas were kept alive by year-to-year arrangement. Members located near the next ESA meeting place were asked to be organizers. Meetings, symposium titles and organizers during that period 1968–1972 were: 1968, Dallas, Texas, "Larvae of North American Aquatic Insects: The Present State of Knowledge," G. F. Edmunds Jr. and K. W. Stewart; 1969, Chicago, Illinois, "Rearing Aquatic Insects," W. L. Hilsenhoff; 1970, Miami Beach, Florida, "Environmental Requirements of Aquatic Insects," A. R. Gaufin; 1971, Los Angeles, California, "Zoogeography and Evolution of Southwestern Aquatic Insects," C. M. Murvosh, R. K. Allen and J. W. Sublette. Symposia and submitted paper titles during this period were held under various Sections, including A, C and E.

By 1972, the need for establishing a special section for this perennially active group had been reiterated many times. Advantages of further organization would be better scheduling and coordination, articulation and continuity of activities associated with the national ESA meetings. It seemed that the timing and willingness of members finally was "right."

In Jan., 1973, R. W. Baumann, Smithsonian Institution, circulated a petition requesting an Aquatic Entomology Subsection within ESA. Timing was an important factor, since the Governing Board was to meet in Feb. W. P. Murdoch, Executive Secretary, had indicated that ca. 25 signatures would be required to bring the matter before the Board. The petition was circulated to personnel at Smithsonian Institution, U.S. National Museum, Florida A&M University, University of Utah, University of Georgia, North Texas State University and University of Maryland. In about 2 weeks 26 signatures were obtained and K. W. Stewart was asked to be the first Chairman of the proposed Subsection. On Feb. 1, 1973, R. W. Baumann and I submitted the petition through W. P. Murdoch to the Governing Board, and asked for time to be set aside at the upcoming Dallas Meeting for a symposium and submitted papers session.

The Governing Board approved the request, and the Aquatic Insects Subsection formally came into existence. As Chairman, I informed persons on a mailing list, composed from previous participants of meetings, about the upcoming Dallas meeting, and invited participation through submitting papers. Chairmen at subsequent meetings have coordinated such things as requesting symposium time, grouping aquatic submitted papers and setting up business meetings, with the ESA Program Chairman.

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R. W. Baumann and I co-planned the 1973 Dallas meeting with the symposium title "Neotropical Aquatic Insects." Dick Baumann lined up an impressive array of speakers including E. J. Fittkau for a special invitational address on aquatic habitats in tropical South America. The other invited speakers were W. L. Peters, M. J. Westfall Jr., R. W. Baumann, D. R. Lauck, H. H. Ross, F. N. Young, C. O. Berg and W. W. Wirth.

Our meetings since that time, symposium titles and elected Chairmen and planners have been: 1974, Minneapolis, Minnesota, "Aquatic Insects of the Great Lakes Region," W. L. Hilsenhoff; 1975, New Orleans, Louisiana, "Ecological Studies of Southeastern Aquatic Insects," J. B. Wallace, and 1976, Honolulu, Hawaii, no symposium due to projected low attendance, but an active submitted papers session, W. H. Resh.

Another major decision was made by Subsection members at New Orleans in 1975, in order to provide better continuity in planning and communication among members. A rotating Executive Committee was elected, to include a Secretary, Vice-Chairman, Chairman and Immediate Past Chairman. The Chairman will preside at Business Meetings, and be primarily responsible, along with his Vice-Chairman, to plan and coordinate Subsection meetings and activities at the ESA Annual Meeting. The following year the Secretary would become Vice-Chairman, the Vice-Chairman would become Chairman etc. This would necessitate election of only a new Secretary each year. It was appropriately suggested by H. H. Ross that this committee be so constituted that the person rotating into the Chairmanship each year would preferably be located near the ESA Annual Meeting site. Duties of the Secretary were not spelled out, but K. W. Stewart suggested that perhaps the Secretary might get out a Newsletter, keep minutes of Subsection Business Meetings and in cooperation with the Chairman be the corresponding arm of the subsection. All of these proposals were enthusiastically endorsed by members at the business meeting, and the initial Executive Committee was elected as follows: V. H. Resh, Chairman (for Honolulu meeting), O. S. Flint Jr., Vice-Chairman (to be Chairman for 1977 Washington, D.C. meeting), and K. W. Stewart, Secretary (to be Chairman for 1978 Houston meeting). J. C. Morse kept the minutes for that important business meeting.

At Honolulu in 1976, R. W. Baumann was elected Secretary, to rotate to the Chairmanship for the Denver, Colorado meeting in 1979. The Subsection symposium for the 1977 Washington, D.C. meeting under Chairman O. S. Flint, Jr. is entitled "Culturing and Rearing Aquatic Insects." Techniques to be discussed should prove useful to systematists, ecologists, survey people and others interested in aquatic insects.

The Subsection will sponsor a symposium at the Houston, Texas 1978 meeting entitled "Innovative Approaches to Teaching Benthic Science and Aquatic Entomology." The program is being developed by V. H. Resh, University of California, Berkeley, and will constitute the second phase after a similar presentation at the North American Benthological Society 1978 meeting in Winnipeg, Canada. It is hoped that those proceedings can be published as a joint ESA-NABS contribution.

This timely evolution of a formal Aquatic Insects Subsection has transcended an increasing appreciation by the scientific community, especially in areas of stream ecology and limnology, of the integral role played by insects in aquatic ecosystems. Major problems of inadequate ability to identify the immatures of most aquatic orders, discussed in the 1966 and 1968 symposia, have partially been solved during this past decade, resulting in the recent generic-level books on mayflies by G. F. Edmunds Jr., S. L. Jensen and L. Berner, 1976, "The Mayflies of North and Central America," and caddisflies by G. B. Wiggins, 1976, "Larvae of the North American Caddisfly Genera (Trichoptera)." Activities of the Subsection in the next decade will undoubtedly encompass further credibility in these groups and others, and promote idea exchange and research in the systematics and biology of aquatic insects.

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