

Report from the 3rd International Congress on Fungal Conservation, Turkey, 11-15 November 2013

Alison Pouliot

The Fungimap Conservation Committee had a terrific series of meetings and discussions last week at Gökova Bay in Turkey. Sapphire McMullan-Fisher, Lyn Allison and Alison Pouliot who reside across Australia, indeed across hemispheres, had an opportunity to meet in one place while participating as delegates of the International Congress on Fungal Conservation.

During the week-long Congress there was much opportunity to discuss the approaches and priorities of the Fungimap Conservation Committee, enriched by the many fungal conservation issues and achievements that were presented during the Congress.

Organised by the indefatigable Dr David Minter (ISFC president) and Professor Dr Mustafa Isiloğlu (and supported by the Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund and Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University), the Congress attracted representatives from 38 countries who met with the shared aim of promoting fungal conservation.



Figure 1. ISFC president, David Minter (Image: Alison Pouliot).

The Congress melded science, education, infrastructure and politics through an intensive week of reviews of mycological conservation research; development of infrastructure for fungal conservation; training workshops in

the global fungal RED-listing process; regional reporting on the status of fungal conservation; discussion of social and political issues relating to fungal conservation, as well as opportunities to explore Turkish fungi via guided forays in the local forests.

The Congress obviously created something of a local fanfare as a procession of suited dignitaries arrived at the opening ceremony in a fleet of shiny black Mercedes, Turkish flags billowing and press team in tow. If only fungi were celebrated so resplendently in Australia! Following the formal greetings in the opening ceremony and presidential address by David Minter, Simon Stuart, Chair of the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) opened the presentation session with an overview of the structure and function of the IUCN and an explanation of the five specialist fungal groups. For a profile of the fungal specialist groups see *Fungal Conservation Issue 2* (2012) on the ISFC website.

The importance of political engagement in fungal conservation was exemplified in Lyn Allison's presentation entitled, 'A former politician's view on fungal conservation'. Lyn provided invaluable advice on political campaigning and understanding how parliaments and parliamentarians operate, as well as an overview of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. An analysis of the threats to federal conservation law in the context of implications for fungal conservation drew our attention to the need for greater contribution to political process by fungal conservationists.



Figure 2. Lyn Allison and Giuliana Furci (Image: Alison Pouliot).

Also representing Australasia (the next biggest contingent after the Turkish!) was our colleague from across the Tasman, Peter Buchanan, who provided an overview of the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI). Peter is one of two appointees representing mycology on the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA). To the entertainment of the audience, Peter also described his own personal fungal conservation strategy via his unchallenged distribution of T-shirts promoting fungal conservation at the GTI and SBSTTA meetings, also personally modelled during his presentation.

The second day of the Congress was dedicated to a review of fungal conservation progress across the globe as regional and country reports. Sapphire McMullan-Fisher presented the current Australian situation highlighting achievements of Fungimap as well as the Atlas of Living Australia as a major initiative facilitating fungal data access. It seems that most countries share similar challenges to fungal conservation including the dearth of mycologists, funds, RED-listed species, action plans and public/political disinterest. However, the Chilean report, presented by Giuliana Furci provided a refreshing and exciting example of how the motivation and passion of one person culminated in the inclusion of fungi in Chilean environmental legislation. Consequently the Chilean government is obliged to provide mycological baselines in every Environmental Impact Assessment as of December 2013.



Figure 3. Sapphire McMullan-Fisher, Peter Buchanan and Paul Cannon (Image: Alison Pouliot).

Following the plenary session of the ISFC on the third day we headed into the forests of the Kazanci and Cicekli areas. With temperatures in the mid twenties and no rain in the previous week, the field sites were fairly dry however several species were still recorded including various *Lactarius* spp., *Russula foetens*, *Coprinus* sp., *Mycena seynii*, *Psathyrella candolleana*, *Agrocybe* sp., *Lentinus tigrinus*, *Tubaria* sp., *Suillus* sp., *Coriolopsis polyzona*, *Ganoderma lucidum*, *G. resinaceum*, *Trametes versicolor*, *Scotomyces subviolaceus*, *Hirschioporus abietinus*, *Chondrostereum purpureum*, *Pisolithus arrhizus* and *Scutellinia* sp.

The following day Michael Krikorev from Sweden ran an important workshop on the global fungal RED-listing process via the new website he has set up with Anders Dahlberg and Greg Mueller. Further information about this process and how to nominate species will be presented in more detail on the Fungimap blog and in the Newsletter over the coming months. Three additional workshops entitled, 'Fungal Conservation: Raising Awareness', 'Conservation of Myxomycetes' and 'Conservation of Desert Truffles: an example of how to use information sources for RED-listing' provided participants with not just information but the tools and knowledge for direct action initiatives.

The final day of the congress focussed on fungal conservation. Alison, Lyn and Sapphire all presented papers on various aspects of fungal conservation, which will be published in the upcoming ISFC newsletter.

Various awards were given for posters, presentations and conservation initiatives with the lifetime achievement award for fungal conservation won by Maria Lawrynowicz from Poland. Maria's presentation on the World Heritage-listed Bialowieza Forest – which dates back to 8000 BC and contains the last remaining stands of European primeval lowland mixed forest where 1900 fungal species have been recorded – was a reminder of the importance of conserving such habitats for all biodiversity.

Overall, we gleaned many excellent ideas and strategies for fungal conservation that can be applied to the Australian fungal conservation situation. These include possibilities for editing websites such as Wikipedia to improve the profile of fungi; the importance of strategic timing in finding windows of opportunity for inserting fungi into legislation; opportunities to tap into the corporate sector; and remembering that while scientists provide data and lists, others are necessary to activate conservation. These ideas will be discussed and expanded in forthcoming articles on the Fungimap website.



Figure 4. The Çiçekli region where the field trip was held (Image: Alison Pouliot).