

# Paris and its Jardin des Plantes, or The 2004 annual meeting of the FishBase Consortium

by **Brajgeet Bhathal and Daniel Pauly**

The FishBase Consortium, which supervises the further development of FishBase (which just reached 14 million 'hits per month!') had its latest meeting on September 1-3, 2004, in beautiful Paris (where an aunt of the first author happens to live). This made her stay there particularly agreeable, especially as the meeting took place at a building of Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle (MNHN) that could be reached only by walking through the *Jardin des Plantes*, originally created for the French kings. The members of the Consortium represented were the MNHN (represented by Dr Nicolas Bailly, who had defended his PhD thesis the day before...), the FAO (Rome, Italy), the Africa Museum (Tervuren, Belgium), the Swedish Museum of Natural History (Stockholm, Sweden), the WorldFish Centre (Penang, Malaysia) and the Fisheries Centre. Dr Cornelia Nauen, of the European Commission in Brussels, an early and strong supporter of FishBase, also attended.

The meeting was chaired by Nicolas Bailly, who replaced the outgoing Consortium Chair, a clearly much-relieved Daniel Pauly, and this was well run, especially as Bailly had much help from his wife, Deng Palomares.

The meeting had three components: 1) a one day presentation of progress reports by the Consortium members; 2) a one day mini-symposium on biodiversity database inspired by FishBase; and 3) a one day discussion of work plans.

The first thing that the Consortium did, though, was discuss and unanimously accept the application of the School of Biology (Laboratory of Ichthyology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece) to join the



*Consortium members at the Paris meeting, including members mentioned in the text: Brajgeet Bhathal, Deng Palomares and Nicolas Bailly (front row, second, third and fourth from left); Rainer Froese (middle row, between Palomares and Bailly); and 'Kostas' Stergiou (third from right).*

FishBase Consortium as a new member. Not only that, but Dr 'Kostas' Stergiou, who has long collaborated with the FishBase group, and who led the 3-person delegation from Thessaloniki, was elected vice chair for the year 2004-2005, and thus will become chair in September, 2005, at the next Consortium meeting (which will be held in Thessaloniki).

The Fisheries Centre report was jointly presented by Daniel Pauly, Deng Palomares and Brajgeet Bhathal. Pauly's contribution highlighted the many deep links between FishBase and the website of the *Sea Around Us* project (see [www.seaaroundus.org](http://www.seaaroundus.org)), which emphasizes marine fisheries and their underlying biodiversity and ecosystems. Palomares reported on the FishBase-inspired biodiversity databases initiated by the *Sea Around Us*, notably on sea cucumbers (which she started), sea turtles and other marine reptiles (by Colette Wabnitz), and marine mammals (by Kristin Kaschner). Bhathal presented the work she did on assembling common names on Indian fishes and making

them available in various Indian scripts through FishBase (this work is documented, at least in part, in the issue of March 2004 of the *Sea Around Us* Newsletter, which was distributed to the meeting participants). The mini-symposium on FishBase-inspired databases was both interesting and disappointing. It was interesting because it is quite clear that lots of our taxonomic colleagues have now understood

that they must make their knowledge available to a wider audience than has so far been the case, and use the web to do that. But the presentations were also disappointing because the same errors continue to be made, which will prevent these databases from enjoying a success comparable to that of FishBase (e.g. not providing access to the data via common names or 'national lists', forcing visitors to register – or even enter passwords – before being able to see the data, not acknowledging inputs from third parties, etc.). Clearly, we still have a long way to go.

The decisions regarding Consortium member work plans need not concern us here. Suffice to say that next year, FishBase will contain more data on more fish from more countries, and will thus garner more hits per month than the 14 millions it just reached. Notably, Brajgeet Bhathal will be working with Dr. A. G. Ponniah of the WorldFish Center on the translation into Hindi of the FishBase search page, thus making it more accessible to a wide range of potential new users.

