Further Section

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Announcement/Varia

Société Francophone de Primatologie Francophone Primatological Society

The Francophone Primatological Society (Société Francophone de Primatologie; SFDP) was established on the 12th of June 1987 and its first General Assembly was held in Paris on the 17th of December 1987. The aims of this new body, which is affiliated to the International Primatological Society, are:

to further national and international research in primatology, especially research of an interdisciplinary nature:

to serve as a forum, particularly within the French-speaking community, for those interested in the conservation, breeding and study of primates;

to provide a framework for discussion and action regarding ethical issues.

The board of the Society appointed for 1987 is as follows: J.-J. Petter (Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle,

Paris), Chairman R. Albiguac (Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris), Vice-Chairman

F. Jouffroy (CNRS, Paris), Treasurer

B.L. Deputte (CNRS, Paimpont), Secretary General N. Herrenschmidt (Unité de Primatologie, Strasbourg), Deputy Secretary General A. Gautier-Hion (CNRS, Paimpont), IPS Secretary for Europe

G. Germain (INSERM, Paris)

G. Mahouy (Inst. Rech. Maladies du Sang, Hôpital

St-Louis, Paris) M. Thivillon (Parc Zoologique, St-Martin-la-Plaine) M. Colyn (Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren)

Further information may be obtained from: M. B.L. Deputte, Secrétaire Général, Société Francophone de Primatologie, Station Biologique de Paimpont, F-35380 Plélan-le-Grand, France (Tel: 99 07 81 81).

The following decision was reached at the General Assembly on the 17th of December 1987:

‘La revue Folia primatologica est l'organe de presse officiel de la Société. Elle publiera les résumés des communications faites lors des colloques annuels, les annonces de ces colloques et autres informations concernant la Société.’

{Folia primatologica is the official publication medium of the Society. This journal will publish summaries of papers presented at the annual meetings, announcements of such meetings and other information concerning the Society.}

The reduced subscription rate for Folia primatologica available to members of national and international primatological societies will also apply to the Francophone Primatological Society.

Eocene Primates in Danger

The fossil history of the primates of modern aspect (Euprimates) has as yet been traced back only to the early Eocene. During the Eocene (38-55 million years), the world climatic conditions were generally much warmer than at present, and, probably for that reason, fossil primates are relatively well documented from the northern hemisphere for that geological epoch. Reliably identified Eocene primates have been reported both from North America and from Europe. Until recently, the best-documented forms were the North American genera *Notharctus* and *Smilodectes*, for which relatively abundant associated cranial and postcranial material has been reported. Until recently, by contrast, the European forms were documented only by skulls (mainly from *Adapids*, including *Leptadapis*) and by isolated postcranial bones attributed to those genera. This situation has now changed dramatically, primarily thanks to the single fossil site of Messel bei Darmstadt in the Federal Republic of Germany. The oil shale deposits at this middle Eocene site (once used for commercial exploitation) are unusual in that the various specimens found there are remarkably

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well preserved. Vertebrate skeletons are usually found articulated (virtually complete in most cases), and traces of soft parts are commonly present. As yet, no complete articulated primate specimen has been found; but three partial skeletons found in the last few years have already been described, and a fourth is currently under study.

Quite apart from the primate specimens found, the Messel site is of singular importance because of the unique opportunities it provides for detailed reconstruction of an Eocene community including primates. For instance, more than 50 virtually complete bat skeletons have been recovered, and it has been possible to learn much about their diets from insect remains in residual stomach contents. Complete skeletons of many other mammals have been discovered, including an apatemyid (with adaptations of its anterior dentition and fingers resembling those of the aye-aye) and a tamandua (from a group previously thought to be confined to the New World). Particularly valuable recent finds include late pregnant females of *Propalaeotherium* (an early member of the horse group), showing that a single, well-developed fetus was typical.

The great excitement that recent finds at Messel have aroused in the scientific community has been matched only by shocked disbelief that the local government proposed to press ahead with plans to use the quarry as a central rubbish dump. An active programme of excavation is currently under way, with major participation of the Hessisches Landesmuseum, the Forschungsinstitut und Museum, Senckenberg, Frankfurt am Main, and the Naturkundemuseum der Stadt Dortmund. On the one hand, this programme has led to the recovery of many valuable specimens; on the other, it has shown just how much remains to be discovered in the future. It should, for instance, be only a question of time before a complete primate specimen is discovered. In view of the great importance of the Messel site, it is, therefore, imperative that plans for rubbish disposal there should be completely abandoned. Numerous written submissions have been made (to the Hessischer Ministerpräsident, Bierstadter Strasse 2, 6200 Wiesbaden), and the latest news is that the plans for rubbish disposal at the Messel site have been partially suspended.

In view of the fact that uncertainty continues to reign about the future of the Messel site, the following resolution was signed by 40 primatologists at the International Symposium

‘Speciation, Systematics

and Conservation in Prosimians’, held in Mulhouse (France), July 27-29, 1987:

‘Recognizing the outstanding value of the Eocene fossil site of Messel bei Darmstadt, we the undersigned urge the competent authorities to abandon plans to bury the fossil deposits by waste disposal. This site provides unique opportunities for reconstructing evolutionary history at an early stage of mammalian evolution. In particular, the known fossil finds include early primates and can therefore throw new light on the early origins of the human species. Because of the unusual conditions of fossilization, the deposits at Messel provide unique information on Eocene mammals, both through the preservation of complete skeletons and through the partial preservation of soft parts. No other Eocene fossil site in the world has yielded information of comparable quality, as for example in documenting stomach contents or stages of fetal development. The site of Messel bei Darmstadt is an evolutionary monument of international importance that should be preserved at all costs. It is essential not only to preserve the fossil deposits for present research programmes, but also to maintain a substantial part of those deposits over the long term so that future generations may investigate them with improved techniques.’

[Report prepared by R.D. Martin]

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