

Peter Green reports on the first award of the SfAM International Development Fund

Culture Collection Training Course: INBio, Costa Rica

PRESERVATION AND UPKEEP of biological resources, in the case of collections of organisms which serve as the bedrock of reference material necessary for research, is by no means a simple matter. Costa Rica's National Biodiversity Institute (INBio) recognized a pressing need to fill a knowledge gap to adequately preserve and maintain the microbial collections scattered throughout the different research organizations within Costa Rica and to bring together a group of their representatives to discuss this situation.

This prompted INBio, a non-profit, public interest, NGO, to seek training for national scientists in this area. Through one of our collaborators, Dr. Marcel Jaspars at the University of Aberdeen, we began our contact with the National Collections of Industrial, Food and Marine Bacteria (NCIMB) in the United Kingdom. With the help of the Curator at NCIMB (Dr Peter Green) we submitted an application to the new *SfAM International Development Fund* (IDA). The funds were allocated to a three day training course to be held at INBio and with the participation of three experts from UK: Dr. Peter Green, Curator, NCIMB, Aberdeen, UK; Dr. Paul Kirk, Senior Mycologist CABI Bioscience, Egham, UK and Professor Michael Goodfellow, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. We worked on this application and on November 2003, we received the good news that it had been accepted. Hence, the preparations for the "Culture Collection Training Course" in April 2004 started.

The main aim of the course was to bring together national researchers and for the experts to lay out the basics of preservation, maintenance and handling of microbial collections. Nineteen researchers from eight organizations were invited to participate at no cost since their expenses were covered by the SfAM IDA grant. Their educational background ranged from B.Sc. to Ph.D in areas such as: Chemistry, Microbiology, Biotechnology, Biology, and Agronomy. The youngest participant was 21 and the oldest in their forties. The list of participating researchers and their affiliations are shown in the panel on the right (also see picture at right)

Specifically, the grant money provided was used to cover the costs related with the experts travel and accommodation, the meals, equipment and materials (including a certificate of participation) needed for the workshop as well as for providing a set of books to each of the participating organizations and two 2-year SfAM memberships for two outstanding young researchers.

In summary, 16 presentations were given by the experts and participants in the form of a roundtable. On the third day, the participants were given the opportunity to have one-on-one sessions with the experts with whom they could tackle their specific and current concerns regarding management of the collections. The lunches and informal dinner also provided a space for networking and exchange of scientific and business views.

In addition to each of the participants receiving the training course materials, three of the most salient points from the discussion fora, under the guidance of the UK experts, are summarized below:

1. The eight organizations share common problems, to name a few: limited or non-existent funding to maintain the collections, limited personnel and none dedicated to this task, problems with existing infrastructure (no space to house the collections, equipment failure) and lack of information on how to solve problems on how best to preserve the specimens and avoid contamination.

2. Participants acknowledge that pooling of resources and generation of common guidelines for culture collections make good sense. Hence, participants have begun discussions on the possibility of structuring a Costa Rican Federation of Culture Collections and its implications. Topics such as: how should the federation be constituted? Which are the priority

organisms that should be a part of the collection? Physically, where would these collections be housed? How would information be archived? What could each of the institutions contribute? Which would be the funding mechanisms for the federation? Who should spearhead the process and become the leader in the implementation of a federation?

3. The University of Costa Rica, particularly its Faculty of Microbiology, was mentioned as a likely candidate for spearheading this initiative. Results from an initial meeting at the University to discuss the idea of a federation are pending.

INBio is very satisfied with its work as a facilitator for this initiative. The Institute recognizes the value of the results of the course and is confident that these initial meetings will be the stepping stones for further discussion and a tangible outcome in the form of some formal culture collection structure and network within Costa Rica.

INBio and NCIMB would like to thank SfAM for their support in making the training course a reality.

Peter Green
NCIMB, Aberdeen, UK

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND AFFILIATIONS

Course tutors:

Dr. Peter Green, Curator, NCIMB, Aberdeen, UK, Dr. Paul Kirk, Senior Mycologist CABI Bioscience, Egham, UK; Profesor Michael Goodfellow, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

National Researchers:

Ana Sittenfeld, CIBCM-UCR; Catalina Murillo, INBio; Caterina Guzmán, UNA Cindy Araya Castillo, ICP; Eduardo Hidalgo, CATIE; Erick Hernández, ITCR; Giselle Tamayo, INBio; Iván Rodríguez, INBio; Jorge Blanco, INBio; José Matías, INBio; Loengrin Umaña, INBio; Lorena Uribe, CIBCM-UCR; María Isabel Ríos, INBio; Marielos Mora, CIBCM-UCR; Miguel Obregón, INA; Myriam Hernández, INBio; Nefertiti Campos, INBio; Norman Rojas, Faculty of Microbiology-UCR; Silvia Soto, INBio.

Further Information

- www.inbio.ac.cr
- www.ncimb.co.uk
- **SfAM Endangered Culture Collection Fund:** www.sfam.org.uk/prizes.php



The Course members