

Chairman's Message

Thirty valuable minutes

Chairman's Half Hour tends to start slowly, and I actually quite enjoy the awkward silence that follows my opening request for comments. It reminds me of undergraduate lectures, students shifting uncomfortably, avoiding eye contact, wishing they were sitting even further to the back. My new tack is to ask a question at the very start of a module and reward the student who answers with a free memory stick, courtesy of the RSPSoc Annual Conference. We'll see over the semester if student interaction can be bought... Chairman's Half Hour is different of course, and not only because Paul Newby's presence always guarantees the chairman a few questions. There are matters people wish to address, and with a little prompting, discussions develop quickly and rarely end within the allotted time.

For those unfamiliar with Chairman's Half Hour, this is an open forum held at the Annual Conference where RSPSoc members are free to quiz the chairman on anything they like. Notable discussion topics this year included whether or not we should consider changing the Society's logo and even its name, and the Treasurer's 'RSPSoc Promotion Fund'. Debate on the Society's logo and name was actually quite clear-cut. There was strong consensus to change and modernise the logo, but resistance to altering the Society's name, though the 'oc part of the acronym was considered a little dated. For context, this matter was recently raised in a discussion paper circulated among the Membership and Publicity Committee, so members' views will be acted upon in the not so distant future. Additional views are, of course, still welcome. My email address is below.

The RSPSoc Promotion Fund is a one-off fund established by the Society's Treasurer to be used 'for any specific project that involves the promotion of the Society and its objectives, and which is seen to provide a benefit to all members'. This fund, totalling £11,519, is available to all members and must be spent by 31 March 2009. Suggestions for projects during Chairman's Half Hour included the Newsletter revamp, organisation of a Summer School, production of educational materials and further enhancements to the website. If you have any further suggestions, please do let us know.

The RSPSoc 2008 conference itself was another fantastic event, following on from last year's success in Newcastle. The venue in Falmouth was superb, both modern and very picturesque – a school of dolphins even made an appearance during the Monday night sea boat cruise! The technical programme was strong, and during one keynote address, Professor Alan O'Neil of NERC's National Centre for Earth Observation stated his clear aim for NERC to collaborate more closely with RSPSoc. This bodes well for the scientific calibre of RSPSoc events. Conference organisation was absolutely seamless overall and Karen Anderson and her team are congratulated for putting on a very good show. I look forward to Leicester next year, and Cork the year after for my final half hour of awkward silences and ultimately lively and very valuable discussion.

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