

EDITORIAL

An endangered species: the practical paper?

Once upon a time, in early ASTIN days, the practical paper (*scriptum practicum*) was roaming freely in the pages of the ASTIN Bulletin, like the bison (*bison americanus*) in the wild prairies of the West or the dinosaurians (*diplodocus longus*, *brontosaurus excelsus*, *ceratosaurus nasicornis*, . . .) in the late Cretaceous pastures; he seemed to enjoy a happy, unabated life; his offspring was proficient, and only now and then could some echos of lively disputes be heard. Nowadays, the species seems to have all but disappeared from the earth's surface: only scattered subjects were spotted in recent ASTIN past, while zoologists' reports from expeditions to distant regions like SAJ or IME hardly mention any survivor.

Scientists still quarrel about the causes of this near-extinction. Was *scriptum practicum*, like the koala (*phascolarctus cinereus*), victim of deep environmental changes, so deep that he couldn't find any more food? This explanation does not resist any serious scientific analysis, since the main feeding source (problems from insurance industry) certainly hasn't dried up, on the contrary. Was he, like the dinosaur, ill-designed (too small a brain for too large a body) so that he couldn't adapt to a changing world? One only has to look at early specimens to be convinced that this cannot be true. Did he die, victim of a parasitis, a new species that developed out of proportion and finally suffocated him? That could be. Indeed, a fairly strange animal, the theoretical paper (*divagationae actuarosauri academici*) undoubtedly has tremendously developed in recent times. Was he, like the bison, systematically hunted and destroyed by a predator? Maybe: there is growing evidence that heartless scientific editors (*actuarosaurus monstruosus*) claimed some prey in the area. Several other explanations were put forward and led to numerous doctoral theses: the classical "I-am-overworked-and I-am-not-paid-for-writing-papers-so-let-academics-who-have-nothing-else-to-do-anyway-do-the-job" syndrome, the much debated "my-boss-would-never-let-me-publish-those-figures" virus, or the infectious "that-problem-gave-me-daily-headaches-for-three-months-so-the-hell-with-it" disease.

None of these theories seems very convincing; nevertheless, the basic problem remains: the species is in danger, and protective measures urgently need to be taken in order to avoid extinction. The first decision that was adopted by the ASTIN Committee was the creation of an international wildlife refuge or reservation; for unknown reasons, it was called "workshop". Then, a world-renowned expert, Dr. Harry REID, was summoned, and the positive effects of his actions can already be noticed in this issue. But total success cannot be achieved unless everyone feels concerned; the ASTIN Bulletin can only be representative of the vast diversity of the ASTIN membership if everybody contributes. The editors of the Bulletin are eagerly waiting for your articles.

Jean LEMAIRE
Chairman