

## Birmingham 2017 SVPCA and SPPC meetings

This document, prepared by Richard Butler (with thanks to Emma Dunne & Andy Jones for editorial help and comments), provides some summary figures on the 2017 SVPCA and SPPC meetings (section 1), as well as a summary of and some comments upon the results of the feedback survey (section 2).

### 1. SUMMARY OF THE MEETING

#### Numbers attending

Total registrations for Birmingham (see below) table were 157, although this number includes a small number of people who did not turn up to the meeting despite having paid registration fees. This places Birmingham broadly equal with Southampton as one of the largest ever SVPCA/SPPC meetings.

	Full			Student		Total			
	SPPC only	SVPCA only	Both	SVPCA only	Both		T-shirts	Field trip	Dinner
Birmingham 2017*	4	NA	96	NA	57	157	40	27	80
Liverpool 2016	1	43	14	28	4	90	25	19	53
Southampton 2015	1	52	24	41	37	155		29	72
York 2014	3	57	25	26	6	117		23	
Edinburgh 2013	5	60	33	32	8	138			
Oxford 2012	2	73	16	25	4	120			

#### Auction and Jones-Fenleigh Memorial Fund

Aubrey Roberts (Southampton; now at Bath) ran the auction this year, ably assisted by Liz Martin-Silverstone (Bristol) and Alessandro Chiarenza (Imperial). Thanks to their remarkable efforts and some fantastic donations (as well as all those of you who bid on and bought auction lots), a total of £2580 was raised for the Jones-Fenleigh Memorial Fund. This is a record total, and we are thankful to all involved.

The guidelines for the Jones-Fenleigh were modified and updated this year, following consultation with the Palaeontological Association (PalAss). You can read these guidelines here: <http://svpca.org/jones-fenleigh.php>. This fund is currently very healthy, with >£26k in the bank according to the publicly available PalAss accounts. The fund is administered by PalAss, and they make payments to successful recipients on the production of receipts.

The awardees of the JF grants for 2017 were: Sally Collins (Birkbeck), Davide Foffa (Edinburgh), Struan Henderson (Edinburgh), Femke Holwerda (Munich), Elizabeth Kerr (Paris), Elizabeth Martin-Silverstone (Southampton), Philip Morris (Hull), Emma Randle (Manchester), Aubrey Roberts (Southampton) and Christina Shears-Ozeki (Portsmouth).

#### Prize-winners

There were two student presentation prizes this year, judged by a panel that was independent of the meeting hosts, and which included Rob Sansom (Manchester), Susannah Maidment (Brighton), Paul Upchurch (UCL), Cindy Howells (Cardiff), and Richard Forrest. The best student talk won a full author processing charge (APC) waiver for a publication at PeerJ. This prize went to Emma Randle (Manchester) with commendations for Elsa Panciroli (Edinburgh) and David Ford (Oxford). The best student poster won a tuition fee waiver for their choice of one of the training courses run by Transmitting Science in Barcelona. The

prize went to Emma Dunne (Birmingham), with commendations for Emily Brown (Birmingham) and Andrew Jones (Birmingham).

### **Gender balance**

There has been considerable interest in recent years among the wider community in gender balance within palaeontology in general, and specifically at palaeontological conferences. As a result, we decided to estimate gender balance at the 2017 SVPCA/SPPC meeting. Overall registrations (full plus student) were c. 60% male and c. 40% female. However, student registrations were c. 55% female and c. 45% male, whereas full registrations (which include postdocs/research fellows, university academics, museum professionals and amateurs) were c. 30% female and c. 70% male.

There were no female speakers or abstract submissions in the SPPC meeting. In the SVPCA meeting, c. 65% of the talks were delivered by men, and c. 35% by women. In the poster session c. 55% of the posters were presented by men, and c. 45% by women. This slight overrepresentation of women in the poster session is despite the success rate for getting a talk in the blind abstract review process being identical for men and women (c. 80%). This may reflect the relatively higher representation of women in the student registrations (more likely to present posters) or that there is a small effect of women being more likely than men to request a poster rather than a talk, a suggestion that has been put forward previously to explain similar patterns at other conferences.

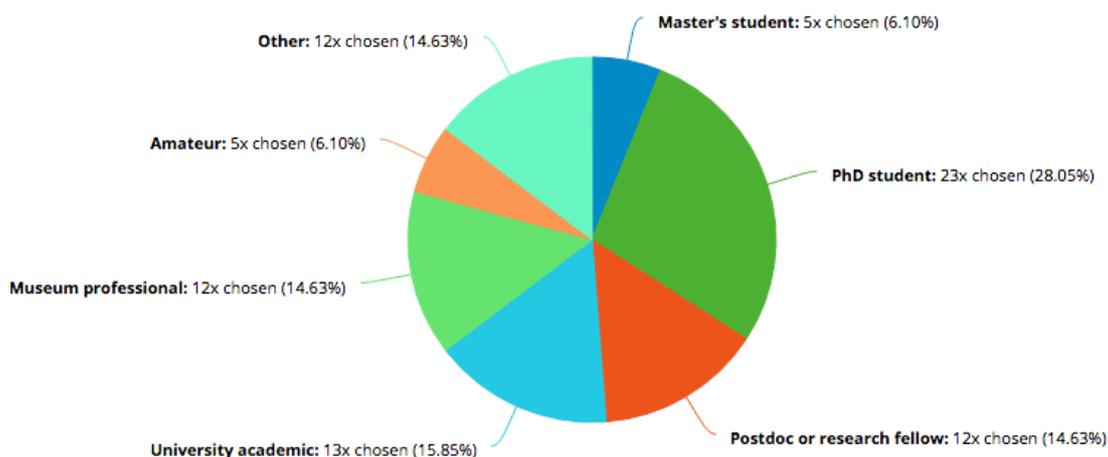
For the macroevolution symposium, there were four male speakers and three female speakers. We had intended to achieve gender parity within the session, but Christine Janis was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting. There was an even gender split for session chairs across the meeting as a whole.

## 2. SUMMARY OF ATTENDEES' FEEDBACK

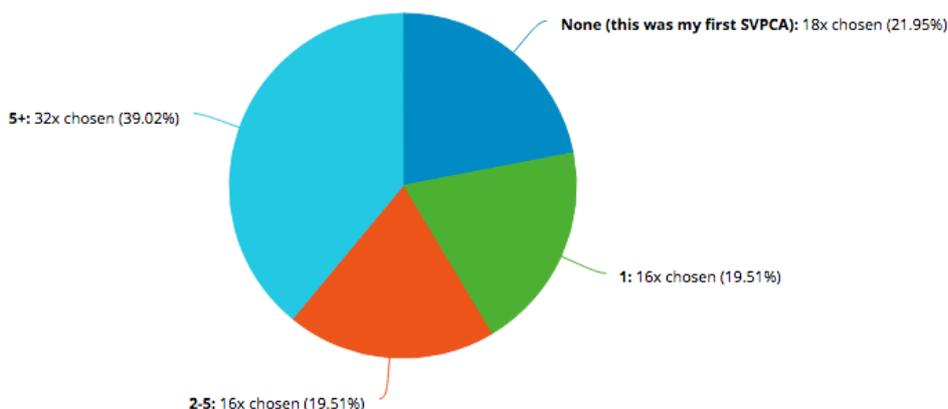
The following is a summary of attendee feedback and some specific responses to and comments on some of the points raised. In general, the responses were extremely positive, but there were some more critical comments and some common themes that I think are worth picking up on. Please note that these are my personal views, and do not necessarily reflect those of the host committee more broadly or the SVPCA Steering Group.

Feedback came from attendees with very diverse career stages, and with a broad range of previous experience of attending the SVPCA meeting. Response rates were high, with 83 responses from c. 135 meeting attendees to whom the survey was circulated (we did not circulate to no-shows or internal registrations).

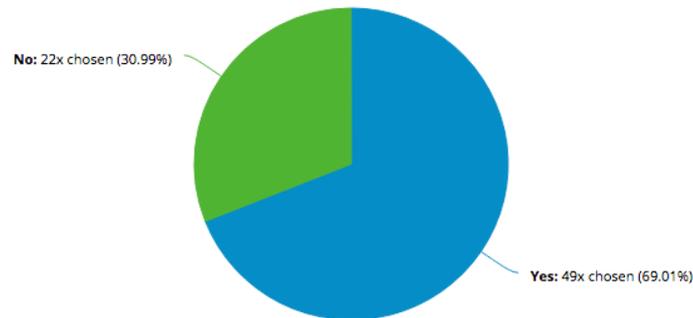
### How would you describe your career stage?



### How many SVPCA meetings have you attended previously?



Did you present your work at either SPPC or SVPCA?



Do you have any further general comments on this year's SVPCA meeting?

*Really, really great meeting. The best SVPCA by far. I also very much appreciated the shorter length of the meeting. Having to only stay for three nights kept the costs down. Great job.*

*Great invited speakers, great annual dinner*

*Very well organised! Well done!*

*I enjoyed it very much, I like the shortened length and more competitive abstract submission, and am looking forward to Manchester.*

*Really enjoyed it. Work presented this year was of a high standard*

*It was a very nice, interesting, and inspiring meeting. Thanks a lot.*

*Initially the idea of having the conference venue so far from the area where people would be staying was worrying but, in fact, I think it worked very well. It did depend on a very efficient public transport system and would not have worked without it.*

*I felt the organisers did an excellent job and hopefully many of the newer ideas will be taken up by future meetings.*

*Congratulations to the team.*

*I thoroughly enjoyed the conference, and thought the standards of the presentations were high. Lots of great speakers and interesting topics. The organising committee did a fantastic job- all information needed was provided clearly and efficiently.*

*Really enjoyed it. Well done. Talk quality was better than previous years, presumably due to shorter meeting and rejection of some talk abstracts. Lightening talks were well pitched too (no complex analysis or hundreds of datasets squeezed into 5 min talk).*

*Venue's worked well. Worth noting for future that in a large city with good transport links, not all meeting and social venues need to be co-located. The schedule offered sufficient time to travel between talk and social venues.*

*A very minor point, but I'd have preferred welcome packs in cardboard document wallets which could be easily recycled rather than the plastic ones used this year to reduce the environmental*

*impact.*

*It was very well organised, well done!*

*The quality of the venues, organization and talks was excellent. It was both a very enjoyable and useful meeting. Well done!*

*Loved the fieldtrip! So inspiring. Loved the evening in the Lapworth, thanks so much for the great food and drink, and it was excellent to hear about the museum renovation. It may inspire researchers who don't know much about museum exhibitions and public engagement to get more involved. Perhaps they happen to have only been to museums that don't do this work nearly as well. Really enjoyed the annual dinner. Would quite like it to remain quite a 'dress up'/formal do, as some of us don't have many chances to go to a posh do, and it's pretty fun and different to do so! Though I love a night at an Indian restaurant, it felt a bit more special last year. It would be great to have feedback on the posters by the judges, perhaps just a very brief feedback form that the judges complete for each student? Always helpful to improve for next time. The auction is so much FUN, and feels key in setting the welcoming and friendly atmosphere that we as students and/or newcomers feel, it's wonderful that all that effort is going to raising fund for the Jones -Fenleigh fund. And the format works so well as a great night out- it's an entertaining show in itself! with loads of audience participation! it also reminds me of some sort of big party-game, which means we can all get to know each other a bit better as a community. Finally the conference organisation was extremely slick, even when it must have been a huge amount of work. It was also really impressive how many volunteers helped run the logistics. Thanks so very much for such a rewarding and fun experience.*

*Very enjoyable.*

*I was unable to attend all the meeting, but I thoroughly enjoyed what I did attend. The catering was generous, the venues worked well and the selection of presentations was excellent. Many thanks to the organisers.*

*Evening events were excellent, both in terms of locations and in quality and quantity of refreshments available. I thought the meeting was very well-run and problem-free, at least from the point of view of attendees. I'm sure that must have taken a lot of behind-the-scenes work to engineer.*

*The best thing was definitely that the fieldtrip was going to Nottingham for the exclusive dinosaur exhibition. I think a lot people would have gone anyway and this was a good way of saving time for me and probably others as well.*

*In general, I really enjoyed this year's meeting. I thought that having the conference over 2 days (2.5 if you include the symposium) increased the quality of the talks, and made it more viable to come for the entire meeting.*

*The lightning talks felt out of place and didn't really add much. The Reception was good and the format of having the meal in a restaurant also worked well.*

*It was well organised thank you! Having the social events in the evenings separate to the conference venue was a bit challenging, but when you have no other choice it cannot be helped. I was also unsure why the meeting organisers were so strict about limiting people from coming when there seemed to be plenty of space in the lecture hall, so I thought that was a shame since the work being presented was excellent.*

*I would have preferred another day of talks. This would have allowed for 20 minute presentations. 15 minutes really is too short. The lack of time for questions and answers during most of the talks I attended at the recent meeting highlights the fact that 15 minutes is too short. I recall previous SVPCA meeting where there was much more discussion, and it was often very interesting.*

*I enjoyed it very much, it was well organised and all the events (ice-breaker, field trip, dinner, auction were great). My only other quibble was that the auction venue was too small and cramped.*

*I hope future meetings are as successful!*

*SVPCA has become a testing ground for young postgrads, often at the beginning of their research, to give talks often of not much substance. It would be good if these were 'lightening talks' so that they do not take up too much time. Also in recent years there have been far too many talks on cladistics/phylogenetics and far too few on actual fossils. A number of people have ceased attending for this reason.*

*It was a fun, well-organised meeting.*

*Still not enough senior members attended. I didn't attend the dinner as I thought the idea of another buffet (cf Southampton) was uninspiring. Not special enough.*

*The reception was extremely well catered. Really good food (though only just enough), a decent beer selection and very plentiful wine. If I was doing it again I think I would have sought accommodation near the university rather than in the city centre, but that's no-one's fault but mine.*

*As a keen amateur, I was a little apprehensive that within such an academic environment I might be out of my depth, not taken seriously, or even looked down upon. These concerns were completely unfounded. Instead I got to hang out with an amazingly friendly, interesting and knowledgeable group of fellow geeks, I hope to return next year.*

*As with the 2016 meeting, the 15 minute presentation times helped keep the sessions varied and interesting, as well as prohibit rambling talks. Though controversial when first implemented, I think these should be standard practise from now on.*

*Great to finally have the meeting at Birmingham, after all this time - it showcased the potential benefits of being more experimental with the format of the annual Symposium on Vertebrate Palaeontology and Comparative Anatomy, and why future organisers should not be afraid to play around with it in the future.*

*I'm not convinced by the need for a separate poster session. it eats into the time available for talks, and if the posters are in the same room as tea and coffee for the whole of the meeting there would be plenty of opportunity to look at them*

*I enjoyed it. It was useful and fun. Organisation was excellent.*

*15 minute talks are certainly the way to go, but possibly make it clear to speakers that 15mins includes changeover time and questions, so they should really be looking at 12 mins. Lightning talks - brilliant idea - just the essentials without reams of graphs and trees. Perhaps encourage more early stage postgrads to use these? Great venue, well organised. It would have been nice to have everyone staying in one place, but not always possible! Annual dinner was lovely - apart from it being a bit noisy, but I know one or two who were put off as it was a curry. Something to note for next year - try where possible to stick to meat and two veg type meals? Good meeting though - well done Richard!*

### **Reasons given for attending SVPCA**

We put forward a number of options that we felt might have contributed to people deciding to attend the 2017 SVPCA meeting. Of these, it appears that the most important was the timing of the meeting, in a more traditional September timeslot. This was closely followed in importance by the macroevolution symposium, the location in Birmingham (presumably as a central, easy-to-reach destination), and the shortened length of the meeting (to 2.5 days). The fieldtrip and the workshops were considered relatively unimportant overall in influencing the decision to attend the meeting - this is unsurprising given the minority of people who attended these, although the feedback for both was positive.

### How important were the following in your decision to attend the 2017 SPPC/SVPCA meeting?



If you have any further comments on why you decided to attend the 2017 meetings, please enter them here:

*I like the ambience and the size of the meeting*

*The opportunity to present science at a conference that is more accessible than the large international conferences.*

*To get updated on others' research in the field of Vertebrate Palaeo, and get feedback from others about my research. Discussions at my poster helped steer my research last year. It also provides a big motivating factor and a great deal of encouragement for me as a PhD student, new to the field. This is in no small part due to the welcoming and friendly atmosphere to the meeting, and practical support for PhD students in attending (Jones-Fenleigh fund).*

*Networking*

*It was a great opportunity to network with other researchers and curators working on mammals*

*To support organizers who were committed to improving the meeting, which they have done.*

*I repeatedly heard positive thing about this conference from colleagues and wanted to try it*

*My main reason for attending is to meet old friends and colleagues and keep up to date with what is happening in the field.*

*Keeps me up-to-date with latest discoveries and thinking*

*The symposium helps a lot as it can be used to attract a bunch of interesting or overseas (non-UK based) speakers that might otherwise not attend. I liked the addition of the workshops and Birmingham is both a convenient (good transport links) and appropriate (e.g., having the Lapworth) venue. The meeting dates meant it did not clash with teaching or other big meetings which is important*

*To specifically see how the changes to the format would compare to my previous SVPCA experience.*

*To catch up with colleagues whom I don't get to see often; to chat to potential students*

*Shorter meeting made it more attractive. Timing was better - August bank holiday / end August is difficult. September is much better*

*Meeting up with friends/colleagues I rarely see and generally catching up with everybody's work.*

*SVPCA is a very important part of the continued significance of VP in the UK. In particular, it provides a supportive environment for early researchers. As a retired, but still active, member of the VP community, who attended their first meeting in 1976, I believe it is important to show loyalty and provide encouragement to each successive generation of researchers.*

*Mainly as an alternative to SVP, which for me is too large and too frantic to be enjoyable.*

*Had a lot of people to talk to. Also, the meeting was the right size of delegates for me to try out to a talk, as a larger meeting would probably scare me off.*

*An overbearing sense of duty and the opportunity to interact with UK-based colleagues for the length of the meeting*

*My supervisors were going and recommended I did too*

*The quality of the science, the lack of parallel sessions, and the smaller, more intimate audience makes for a better meeting*

*Social - it is a great opportunity to meet new researchers as well as catch up with those you already know.*

*Initially found out about the existence of SVPCA when invited to present in the macroevolution symposium, but would have wanted to attend the meeting regardless had I known about it.*

*To hear about the latest research on vertebrate palaeontology*

*I'm a regular!! Only missed a few since 1978*

*It's my only real contact with VP community throughout the year.*

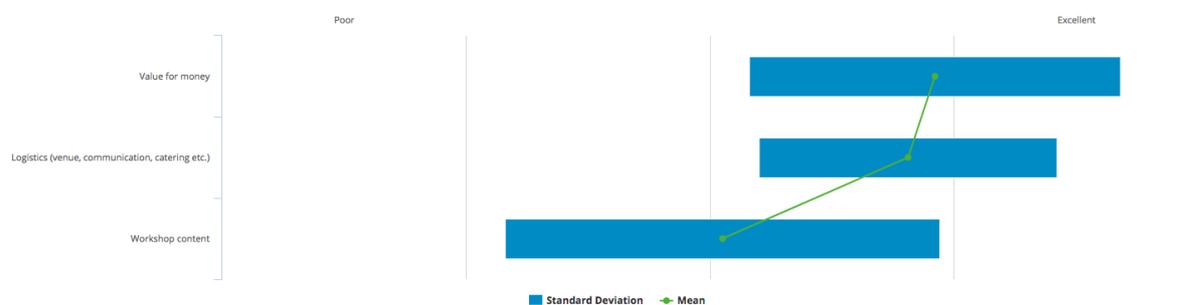
*It's a great opportunity for networking with colleagues and finding out about current research. I'd personally prefer more specimen based talks and less on cladistics, disparity, morphometrics and other theoretical subjects.*

## **Workshops**

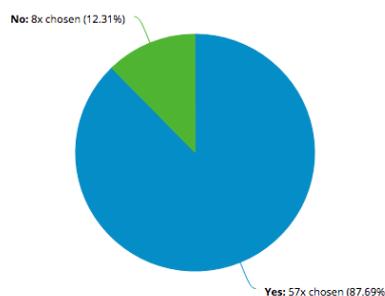
The training workshops were a new development this year, and were aimed at providing short introductions to methods. They were perhaps most suitable for Master's and PhD students, who dominated the career profile of the attendees. Feedback was good overall, and 88% of respondents would like to see similar workshops offered in future years. There has been a long list of suggestions for what those workshops could cover that will be passed on to future meeting organizers (see below).

One organizational decision that we made was to schedule the workshops at the same time as SPPC. We did this because there was no other time to run the workshops within the three day meeting format, and because we considered that the overlap between SPPC attendees (majority being museum professionals) and workshops (majority being PhD students) was likely to be relatively low. This was a slightly unsatisfactory compromise, and we do note that one person raised this clash as a problem in their feedback.

*If you attended one of the workshops, please provide feedback on the following:*



*Would you like to see similar training workshops offered at future SVPCA meetings?*



*Suggestions for topics that could be covered by future workshops*

*Cladistics, Functional Morphology, Ecological modelling  
 R coding and data visualisation for CT scanning (e.g. Avizo, Drishti)  
 Phylogenetics  
 Microwear or taphonomy  
 Preparation or conservation  
 Morphometrics  
 Phylogenetics (inference, time-scaling, comparative methods)  
 Cladistic analysis; geometric morphometrics; statistics; R; sedimentology & stratigraphy  
 Fossil preparation techniques  
 Physical and digital preparation of fossils  
 Working with 3D datasets, photogrammetry  
 Biomechanics*

*ArcGIS, GeoMorph*

*Statistics and PCA*

*Morphometrics - but not just how to make a morphospace, but how to analyse it, carry out statistical tests etc.*

*Fossil preparation aimed at academics*

*How to design an effective talk/poster without hesitation, deviation or repetition*

### **Poster session**

The most critical feedback concerned the poster session. This year, we made the decision that posters would only be available on the Wednesday, but to compensate we would have a dedicated two-hour poster session, unopposed, with refreshments available, and that we would offer a significant prize to the best student poster. This is in contrast to the more normal situation at SVPCA meetings, where the posters have remained up through the meeting, but there has not necessarily been a dedicated poster session – a situation that I have traditionally viewed as undervaluing the posters. It seems that the decision to limit the posters to one day was unpopular overall, and there were also complaints about the cramped space.

In summary, the reasons that the posters were only up on one day were as follows:

- The space used for the conference (Avon Room and Lounge) was by far the best available at the University of Birmingham. The Lounge area was used for all coffee breaks and as a general break-out area. It was our only viable option for posters, but having the poster boards up greatly constrained the space. We were concerned that if posters were up throughout the meeting the Avon Lounge area would be too cramped (as was indeed noted by several respondents for the poster session itself). As some people recognized, UK universities in general tend to lack suitable spaces for poster sessions, particularly directly adjacent to suitable lecture theatres.
- We maybe could have found a space elsewhere on campus to display the posters, but the University would have charged for this, adding significantly to registration costs, and would have been located distant from the talks and coffee breaks.
- Poster board hire was charged on a daily basis. The cost was far from prohibitive and we could have absorbed additional fees, but in view of the above issues we thought that the money would be better spent elsewhere.
- Other conferences routinely have posters up for just a day. This is the case for every poster session at SVP, for the poster sessions at the 2017 PalAss meeting in London, and for the Munich 2017 EAVP meeting. Therefore, what we chose is not unusual in any way by the standards of international conferences.

Clearly, the feedback for future years is that the community would like the posters to be up throughout the meeting. But I would also ask the community to recognize that organizers face difficult logistical challenges given the low budget of the meeting, and they make compromises based on what they feel are the best options available.

If you have any feedback on the format of the poster session please provide it here:

*The format worked well. There was enough time to see posters of interest, but the duration was short enough to ensure that presenters did not get bored and wander away from their posters.*

*The space was too small*

*It was a really good session and great for promoting discussion, but it was not possible to digest all the material. Having the posters up for longer before the session, or even having a longer poster session would have been good.*

*Unopposed poster session is great. Would be good to have posters up throughout the meeting if finances permit*

*I'd prefer them to be up for longer if possible. The dedicated poster session was good, but more time to look at them would also be handy*

*Would have been better to keep the posters up*

*I prefer this format.*

*Whilst a dedicated time for the poster session was a great dead, I would prefer it if the posters were up for the duration of the Symposium not just for a single day*

*Nice if the posters can be up throughout but understand if financial reasons. Was good to have wine served as created a convivial atmosphere.*

*The format worked well. There was plenty of time to review the posters and talk to the presenters.*

*I like having a dedicated, unopposed poster session. However, it is nice when the posters can be up for more than one day, as it gives more opportunities for discussion.*

*I would have liked the poster session to be on two days instead of one as there was not much room to stand at the posters and therefore you couldn't get to talk to all the people presenting posters as was preferred.*

*Having an unopposed poster session is a great idea, but I would have liked to see the posters up for at least one other day. It's hard to see all of the posters during that short time, and not always possible to see all the posters in one day*

*Thought it worked well.*

*The survey cut me off and there is no going back: I was commenting on the ONE day availability of posters. I asked Richard at the meeting and he said it was for reasons of economy, hire of poster boards. Pathetic. We used the room anyway.*

*I thought the posters were quite cramped and out of the way which I thought was a shame. I fully support a dedicated poster session and prizes, but think it is best when the posters are up for the whole conference as well.*

*I really like the poster sessions. It is a good way to learn more about new topics. I would be happy to see more than one dedicated poster session at SVPCA*

*The posters were hard to view because they were facing each other (on one side). One day was also not long enough to see the posters, and spend time talking to the people who brought them.*

*I think it might have been better if the posters could have remained up all week; I wasn't able to look carefully at every poster in the single session*

*A great shame that the posters were on display for such a short time.*

*I don't much like poster sessions anyway.*

*Would have been nice if posters could have been left up for the whole conference*

*Pretty good.*

*Better to have posters up for the whole of the meeting where they can be studied in more depth during breaks in the schedule. This would also free up a session for talks*

*If the posters were left up for more than one day that would be useful; however I did have the time to see the posters that most interested me.*

*Recognizing that there were financial reasons for the brevity of the session, it would have been nice to have the posters displayed for longer (1 day).*

*if it's at all possible to leave the posters up for the whole conference, or a couple of days, it's really nice to be able to discuss them during coffee breaks. As a poster presenter I felt I should stand by my poster during the session, meaning I didn't get much of a chance to look at others' posters. I thought the lightning talks alongside the poster worked well last year, as people who were interested came to find you. So I had a few less folks visit the poster this year. People really should stick to 3 mins though for the lightning talk- I heard that this aspect may have been removed this year because of the time they took- it's unwieldy if everyone runs over 5 mins. As a relatively new PhD student who's a bit nervous of exposing lack of knowledge to such an esteemed gathering, the poster sessions are an absolute gift, and I've thoroughly enjoyed presenting at them this and last year.*

*It will be good in the future to have the posters present all days or at least two days. In addition it will be good to have more space around each poster.*

*It's important having a dedicated poster session, but I think it's good if the posters are set up earlier so you can see them during coffee breaks for example.*

*I missed the poster session, thinking I could see the posters later in the meeting. I would like to see the posters stay up all meeting, as it gives a chance to look at ones previously missed.*

*More space for posters is always a positive!*

*I think that for the poster presenters this format was not ideal. We had to be present next to our poster and had few time to examine the posters of others. In my opinion it would have been better if posters would have been present for more than just one day so that one could have examined them during coffee breaks etc.*

*I prefer to have the posters available throughout the meeting so that I can have more opportunity to see them.*

*Needed more space*

*Like most UK venues the biggest issue with poster sessions is often space (e.g., compared to SVP/GSA-type sessions). However, I personally am strongly in favour of a dedicated poster session and felt able to see/speak to all the poster presenters I wanted to.*

*Leaving the posters on display after the session would be preferable; two hours is not long enough to study the posters, especially when busy.*

*With no financial implications it would be better to have more time to check out the posters as the dedicated session was so busy it was difficult to get round.*

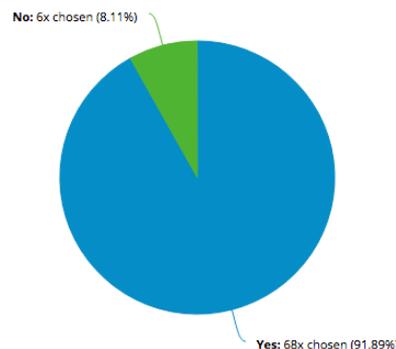
*The poster session was excellent. Having a stand alone session made me dedicate time to read the posters. There was plenty of space for everyone to move around. Poster presenters benefitted from having a dedicated session because they were able to talk about their poster with colleagues at a specified time. The format was excellent.*

*I thought it was a good time slot to put it in. It was little overcrowded, but that would be hard to avoid with the number of attendees.*

### **Macroevolution symposium**

We ran a half-day symposium this year around the theme of 'macroevolution', with invited speakers talking in longer timeslots. This was modeled on the symposium that typically opens the Palaeontological Association annual meeting each year. Overall, the response to this was extremely positive. It was flagged above as a positive reason for attending the meeting by many people, and over 92% of respondents wish to see a similar themed session in future years. Several people noted in the free-text comments that this was the highlight of the meeting, and we were also delighted to note that our efforts towards ensuring gender and career-stage balance were recognized by several respondents. From our point of view, this experiment was a success, and we would encourage future meetings to consider using the same format.

#### Would you like to see similar sessions organized in future years?



#### Do you have any further comments on the macroevolution session?

*Personally, the Macroevolution Symposium was my academic highlight of the conference. I think it is a good idea to have invited speakers presenting, also from a student's perspective because it gives a nice overview of what research groups as a whole are working on across the UK and beyond. Macroevolution was a good topic too, and I would encourage future organisers to even repeat such a topic, as it is broad enough to engage a wide audience, and an important baseline for much of vertebrate palaeontology within UK based research groups.*

*Really liked this session and the 30min talk format*

*Having a session devoted to a more general, but still important, issue added to the value of the conference.*

*It worked well!*

*I found the long talks of abstract concepts hard going, and felt it wasn't right for the opening session. I'd prefer possibly 20 minute talks and try to get some actual specimens involved somewhere. The anatomical side of the conference was a bit lacking.*

*It was really informative, with high profile speakers. In my opinion it was the best session.*

*Didn't attend due to other commitments, but wanted to. Well done for the focus on gender and career stage balance for speakers.*

*Overall, the presentations were very helpful summaries of current thinking which has encouraged think about a new avenue of research. Using sponsorship funding to assist early career researchers participate in the session was beneficial and to be encouraged.*

*Excellent gender and career stage balance, great talks too. Only problem was that there was no time of questions.*

*Generally quite good, although I was alarmed and disappointed to hear one presenter say that they had put their talk together the night before, and it showed. Hopefully if the invited talks gain some momentum, all presenters will treat them more as a privilege.*

*Although the topic was not directly relevant to my research, I enjoyed the symposium. I thought it was a diverse group of speakers, both in terms of the speakers themselves and the topics. I also found it to be a good introduction to a topic that I am not particularly familiar with. I would definitely like to see similar things in future years, particularly if they manage to attract speakers that may not necessarily come to SVPCA otherwise*

*It was great - really nice to have such a diverse set of talks.*

*I thought it was great and would hope to see something similar at future meetings.*

*No, but the symposium session is a good opportunity to have some slightly longer talks by more senior members of the community.*

*Some interesting talks, some less comprehensible to me.*

*I liked having a themed session beyond the usual taxonomic breakdown, but I am not ecstatic about the use of invited speakers rather than talks taken from the blind-reviewed submissions.*

*The speakers chosen were all excellent, and it was nice to see that some effort had been made towards gender balance.*

*I don't think that longer length talks are usually a good thing. One is ok, on a subject that you are interested in. If you're not interested, then they quickly become deadly dull. Shorter talks mean that there is less waffle and more facts. Macroevolution tends to be a more abstract subject and personally I felt it was the least interesting session.*

*Not particularly, I think it's best to just go through the groups, so that fish people can attend at one time, reptiles another etc. I can imagine this is really useful if you are very stretched for time, e.g. an academic about to start the teaching term. People who are particularly interested in a theme (e.g. macroevolution), can spot this content when they read through the abstracts before attending, and make sure they don't miss any particular talks about it.*

### **Auction venue**

The auction probably caused me more stress and headaches as host than any other part of the meeting. A few people have raised the valid observation that the venue was small and somewhat cramped. There were, however, good reasons for choosing it, and overall the auction was a huge success, making more money than any previous auction. There was no viable option to hold the auction on campus that evening. Thus, we decided to go into the city, so that people could eat before arriving at the auction. We looked at a number of possible venues, including Thinktank, but most were prohibitively expensive. We chose The Old Joint Stock because it was perfectly located in central Birmingham, close to restaurants, had good bar facilities, and was affordable to hire. When we booked it I was expecting a 'normal' year in terms of registrations – perhaps 110–120, with the auction attracting around 70–80% of this number. The actual registration numbers reached exceeded my expectations by around a third, and it was for this reason that we had to ticket the auction and that the space was more cramped than we would have liked on the night.

### **SPPC**

We ran SPPC on the first morning, rather than on a separate day as has been the case in previous years. Feedback to this seems to be positive, with several people saying they would not normally attend but did this year.

One specific comment that I do want to pick up on is that we did not mention the Geological Curator's Group (GCG) in the question. SPPC is badged as co-organized with the GCG. Cindy Howells (a GCG committee member) agreed to chair the SPPC session on the day and did an excellent job, for which we are very grateful. Beyond this, however, the GCG's contribution largely consisted of sending some advertisements out to their members. By contrast, we (the SVPCA host committee) booked the space, budgeted the meeting, organized coffee breaks, took registrations, reviewed abstracts, programmed the session, sent out circulars, and organized the tours of the Lapworth. I think there is a need and room for ongoing discussion with the GCG about how they might contribute to and support the SPPC meeting, if it is to continue to be badged as a joint meeting.

### Do you have any further general comments on this year's SPPC meeting?

*Usual rather low attendance suggests that we need to rethink how to run it*

*Good talks and lovely to see round the Lapworth. It's a very valuable aspect of the whole week and needs more promoting. It would be good for a few more students to see the conservation/preparation/curation side of palaeo.*

*Possibly a workshop or two on prep/conservation techniques, storage, or even how to curate/document.*

*It was a shame that the SPPC ran at the same time as the workshops, so I wasn't able to attend.*

*Combining the SPPC and SVPCA into a single meeting meant that for the first time I attended the SPPC talks and I found them very interesting.*

*Great set of talks. In many ways it was better to have this as part of the main symposium as it meant more attendees, and I think it is good to see preparation and conservation presented. There were quite a few GCG members present so it would be good to make more of the link in future.*

*This was the main reason I attended, and found the talks interesting and useful.*

*It was very well organised, well done!*

*Very enjoyable.*

*I thought the session was good, but I wish more people would present on topics. The tours of other museum collection and lab facilities is always informative.*

*I was very impressed with the venue and felt that the meeting was very well organised.*

*SPPC/GCG meeting you mean?*

*Mainly came for SVPCA, but found these sessions to be just as fascinating, and will endeavour to attend in the future.*

### **Annual dinner**

Overall feedback on the dinner has been very good, and we chose an Indian restaurant for an authentic Birmingham experience. However, there have been a few comments along the lines of the restaurant being too noisy (given that we were the only people in there we have no-one to blame but ourselves!), that more people might attend if the food was more of a meat-and-two-veg type affair, and that some people would like to see a more formal, or more 'special' dinner.

We looked at a variety of potential venues, several of which offered a more formal dining experience, including the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) and the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. However, we were hugely constrained by the amount that people are used to paying for the dinner. The annual dinner at SVPCA has never cost >£40/head, but anything more formal or unusual in Birmingham would have greatly exceeded this. In the end we decided to prioritize keeping the cost low, so that as many people as possible could afford to attend.