

Chapter 5

Poking a Hole in the Iron Curtain—Opening Soviet Entomology to the World Community: XIII International Congress of Entomology, Moscow, 2–9 August 1968

Dmitry L. Musolin

*Department of Forest Protection, Wood Science and Game Management, Saint Petersburg State Forest Technical University, Russia
musolin@gmail.com*

The 13th International Congress of Entomology (XIII ICE) was held in Moscow on August 2–9, 1968. It was the first ICE hosted in a country of the Soviet bloc; and as such, it was not only scientifically significant but also an important social and political event.

As is always the case for ICE congresses, the Moscow congress was officially hosted by the country's national entomological society, namely, the All-Union Entomological Society (in Russian: Всесоюзное энтомологическое общество, or, in short—ВЭО; currently, the Russian Entomological Society), the largest union of Soviet professional and amateur entomologists established in 1859 in Saint Petersburg. In 1968, the society had its headquarters in Leningrad and worked under the umbrella of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (Bey-Bienko 1968a). Grigory Bey-Bienko led the successful bid for the Moscow congress at the London congress in 1964 on behalf of the All-Union Entomological Society.

Long before the era of Internet and emails, to organize a huge international meeting was a tremendous task. In a country of planned economy, such as the former USSR, realization of such a project was only possible with full approval and support of the Academy of Sciences, the Communist Party, and the government. The Local Organizing Committee (LOC) consisted mostly of leading Soviet professional entomologists, as shown in Table 5.1. Grigory Bey-Bienko was appointed president of the congress, and a particularly noteworthy choice was Boris Astaurov (Fig. 5.1) for the prestigious role of vice president of the congress.

As one of the USSR's outstanding insect geneticists, Astaurov stood tall for his dignity and heroism among the legion of geneticists persecuted by the "Lysenkoists," who controlled biological and agricultural sciences in the USSR between 1940 and 1964 (Berg 1979). Astaurov's pioneering work on sex determination and cytology of the silkworm was stymied when genetics, then more advanced in the USSR than in most Western countries, was displaced by the pseudoscientific ideas known as "Lysenkoism." Trofim Lysenko rejected Mendelian genetics in favor of the doctrine of acquired characteristics, a form of Lamarckism. Lysenkoism was