Introduction

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This issue of *Paleontological Journal*, and part of the next one, include reports from the Russian-British round table on problems in paleontology, held at the beginning of October 2016 at the Borissiak Paleontological Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. This was the first of a proposed series of round table meetings conceived by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Society of London, and it was no accident that it was dedicated to paleontology. The choice was based on the long-established connections between Russian and British paleontologists, dating back as far as the mid-19th century, and Sir Roderick Murchison's famous expedition to Russia.

The meeting of the round table included 13 scientific reports on various aspects of paleontology. In addition, the Vice-President of the Royal Society, Sir Martin Polyakoff, a well-known chemist, made an interesting presentation on the current possibilities of popularization of science for the attendees of the 13th annual School of young paleontologists held at the Paleontological Institute. The UK delegation included recognized paleontologists, for whom Russian paleontology is of particular interest thanks to the diverse and unique material being investigated by Russian scientists. The main problems discussed at the round table included the End-Permian extinction and the sharp decline in the marine and terrestrial biodiversity at the P-T boundary, the development of amphibians and reptiles in the Late Permian and Triassic of Eastern Europe, the origin and features of the early evolution of large taxa of animals and plants, the migrations of early man, and extinctions of animal species as a result of early human activity.

British and Russian paleontologists remarked on the importance of a round table for the advancement of paleontology in Russia and the UK, and showed interest in a further increase in collaboration supported by representatives of the Royal Society and the British Council. Fruitful discussion of these problems led to the decision to publish the outcomes of this round table in the *Paleontological Journal* in Russian and English, following an invitation from the Editor-in-Chief Academician A.Yu. Rozanov. British paleon-

ologists expressed a wish to publish a joint paper on all the problems discussed, including the history of joint scientific research by Russian and British paleontologists. Prof. M. Benton, a scientific organizer of the round table from the British side, made an excellent compilation of the materials presented by British paleontologists. This interesting work is the opening article of this issue of *Paleontological Journal*. Russian paleontologists used a different approach. Each of the participants wrote a separate article on their subject, sometimes in co-authorship. Altogether, nine papers were received. As a result, because of the large size, the materials of the round table will need to be published in two issues of the *Paleontological Journal*. Papers are divided between issues based entirely on topic, with similar papers presented together. The participants and organizers of the paleontological round table hope that this process will open a new page in the history of research collaboration between Russia and the UK.

The scientific coordinators of the round table, Professor M. Benton and Academician S.V. Rozhnov, on behalf of the participants, express deep gratitude to all those who participated in the organization of this round table: the Vice-President of the Russian Academy of Sciences Academician L.M. Zelenyi and the Vice-President of the Royal Society Sir Martin Polyakoff, Head of the Department of External Affairs of the Russian Academy of Sciences, O.E. Glukhovtseva and Head of Section D.A. Chernouvanova, Senior Policy Adviser of the Royal Society Luke Clarke, Head of Science and Innovation Department of the British Embassy in Moscow Gareth Wynn Owen and Senior Adviser Marina Sokolova, and the British Council. Our special thanks go to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Russia, Dr. Laurie Bristow, and Minister Counsellor (Prosperity) at the British Embassy in Moscow Jonathan Brenton for their kind attention to the round table.

S. V. Rozhnov

Translated by S. Nikolaeva