

# The newsletter of the European Society of Arachnology

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## From the Presidents – past and present

Dear Society Members,  
The opportunity to be the president of ESA for nine years – if I have calculated correctly – will always be memorable for me. This is particularly because I have had the chance to interact with wonderful people - and perhaps because together we managed to advance the cause of arachnology somewhat. So, I would like to thank all congress organizers, council members and the whole Society for having given me this opportunity, and to wish the new council and the new president, Wolfgang, every success and enjoyment in their work.

*Ferenc Samu, past president of ECA*

Dear Fellow Arachnologists,  
Usually, congresses are a kind of central event for a scientific society, if I may say so. Meeting good friends in a relaxing but also inspiring atmosphere, experiencing yet unknown colleagues or seeing the faces behind the names, listening to new scientific achievements, planning new activities, or simply having a chat and a friendly beer with nice people: that is what we like to go for at such meetings. In this regard, the 28th European Congress of Arachnology was definitely a highlight. There were record numbers of participants, which lead to many opportunities to meet friends whilst enjoying a beer or glass of wine. Thank you Marco very much!



The ESA Council at work. Left to right, sitting on chairs: Sara Goodacre, Holger Frick, Wolfgang Nentwig, Theo Blick, Ferenc Samu, Efrat Gavish-Regev, Maria Chatzaki. Sitting on the ground: Christian Kropf and Marco Isaia.

Even in our Society, it is not only about congresses. Each Society needs a minimum of self-administration and the General Assembly of all Society members deals with this. In Torino the usual elections happened and also a new president had to be elected. This honour was entrusted to me and I am now starting to find my role in this new function. I want to thank all council members for their confidence in me. My warmest thanks go also to the past president, Ferenc Samu, for the many years during which he chaired our Society.

Keeping a Society alive is not easy and I will do my best to make ours as attractive as possible. This, however, is never a one-man-show and so I will need your input. I welcome all ideas that will support our Society, particularly those that will make it more attractive to students and young researchers. If you have ideas for new areas of activity or know how to acquire further resources, please contact me. I am looking forward to joint activities in our Society and am hoping to see many of you at our next meeting.

*Wolfgang Nentwig, president of ECA*

## Please contribute

We also invite all members of the Society to contribute news and announcements to the newsletter, which we hope will become a regular feature.

## Congress Report

*By Sara Goodacre*

*Photos by: Francesco Tomasinelli, Alberto Chiarle, Elena Piano Jr, Mauro Paschetta. More photos on [www.eca2014.it/photos](http://www.eca2014.it/photos)*

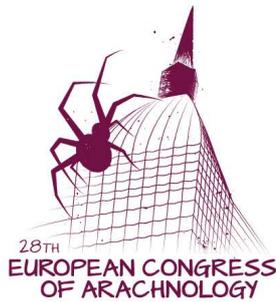
The 28th European Congress of Arachnology was hosted by Marco Isaia and his group at the Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology at the University of the beautiful city of Torino, Italy. Marco was supported by a fantastic team of colleagues: Mauro Paschetta, Alberto Chiarle, Raquel Galindo, Rocco Mussat, Elena Piano Sr and Stefano Mammola. We are indebted to all of the team, and to the large number of additional



volunteers, who hosted us and made us so welcome in Torino.



Marco Isaia, Head of the XXVIII European Congress of Arachnology (left) and the congress logo (right): a spider climbing the Mole Antonelliana, the iconic tower of Torino



The congress began in the evening of August 24<sup>th</sup> with a welcome reception in the congress venue. The palace in which the Department of Life Sciences and Systems Biology is situated was built in 1600, originally as a baroque monastery, and has several cloisters and historical frescos. It was the perfect setting for colleagues and friends to gather on a warm summer evening and to prepare for the really interesting week that was to follow.



Lunch and coffee breaks in the cloister

The Congress was attended by 225 participants (including 27 accompanying persons and 15 members of staff) from 41 countries – a truly impressive number that speaks volumes about how collegiate the arachnological community is and how greatly people value this meeting. The countries represented all continents – as has become almost the norm - and from all continents barring Antarctica (although even this region featured in one of the contributed talks.)

There were some members who were unable to attend due to difficult issues in their home countries. Marco himself made a special mention of absent colleagues and friends in his opening presentation on the first morning of conference. One of the wonderful things about our scientific community is

that it crosses borders and boundaries in a very special way – and we want it to remain so.

The conference was opened by our host, Marco Isaia, and opening addresses were also given by Professor Paola Bonfante of the University of Torino, and Professor Paolo Tongiorgi of the University of Modena, who was an honorary member of the scientific organizing committee. Professors Bonfante and Tongiorgi both welcomed participants most warmly to the congress and wished everyone the best of success with their research.

The scientific program itself was split over four days of talks, and comprised 5 plenary talks, 81 oral presentations and 81 posters that encompassed a wide breadth of arachnological research, with 22 thematic sessions (12 for oral presentations and 10 for posters) in addition to three special symposia. A wide range of contributed talks followed each plenary, many of which were given by students. The talks were split into subject areas such as behavioural and community ecology, functional morphology, biogeography, systematics and faunistics, phylogeography and phylogenetics. Three special symposia placed at various stages throughout the congress also added focal points, covering topics such as invasive species, mating strategies and spider genomics.

In between these varied talks – be they plenaries or contributed sessions - there was a constant feature - the magnificent food and drink! The choice of food was amazing and the excellent Italian coffee was absolutely superb. All of this was enjoyed in the inner courtyard of the ancient monastery, which only added to the enjoyment.

Speaking of enjoyment – our hosts ensured a great program of evening entertainments that began with a Jazz group rather aptly named ‘Spider Jazz Trio’ on the evening of the first full day of talks. This was accompanied by a specialty of Torino, the *aperitivo*, which is a buffet and accompanying cocktails. This was the perfect end to a very stimulating day. The second evening saw guided tours of Torino, where our guides described in the perfect level of detail the history of the city and its cultural background. Wandering through the perfectly parallel streets and admiring the Piazzas, statues, museums and facades was a wonderful way to learn about the past events that have shaped this beautiful city.

### Arachnological Science

The plenary talks given throughout the conference illustrated the breadth of research covered at the



meeting. Martin Entling gave the first talk of the conference, presenting a really interesting discussion of trophic interactions in spiders and their importance in ecosystems. His work on changes in abundance following habitat disturbance emphasized the different processes that operate to create the spatial patterns observed in terms of species distributions and densities. Martin's presentation was followed by talks ranging from the ecology of cave species (Stefano Mammola) to studies of wolf spider behavior (Bernard Eggs) and spider conservation (Luis Crespo).



The plenary talk by Martin Entling

The afternoon saw a continued theme of spider ecology and evolution, with parallel sessions on spider behavioural ecology and community ecology. Subjects covered included the diversification of passive defences (Stano Pekar), explanations for imperfect mimicry (Guadalupe Corcobado) and manipulation of spider hosts by parasitoids (Stanislav Korenko). There were also presentations on changes in abundance of species over several decades (Léon Baert) and in the shorter term (Mert Elverici).

Lucia Kuhn-Nentwig started off the sessions on the second day with a talk on the complexities of venom evolution, where natural selection appears to have favoured diversification of individual toxins whilst at the same time maintaining synergistic interactions. These interactions appear to be responsible for the magnitude of the effect on targeted prey. Lucia's talk was followed by talks in the field of physiology, including presentations on different physical properties of particular spider silks (Dakota Piorkowski and Jonas Wolff) and environmental factors that might influence web properties (Sean Blamires). Following a coffee break there were talks on subjects such as diversity and complexities of reproductive anatomy (Yuri Marusik, Rachel Werneck) and morphological asymmetry (Bernhard Huber). These all illustrate how much more there is

to learn about the underlying basis for the morphological diversity that we observe in arachnids, and also how particular groups, such as harvestmen, may provide excellent tools for investigations into the importance of processes such as sexual selection.

The afternoon session was taken by a symposium on invasive species, with an overview given by Wolfgang Nentwig and example species from a diverse range of geographic locations that included Israel (Yael Lubin) and the Antarctic zone (Sara Goodacre), and different habitat types within Europe (Henrik Krehenwinkel and Angelo Bolzern). Fascinating talks on social spiders completed a very interesting day, with talks ranging from the basis for matrophagy in social *Stegodyphus* (Christina Holm), to phylogenetic evidence for multiple origins of sociality in thomisids (Jasmin Ruch).

The following day was 'Excursion day', of which more later on in this newsletter, but following a wonderful day during which we could enjoy some Italian sunshine, we returned to the congress venue. There were two keynote speakers on our first day back. Erhard Christian fascinated us all with his talk on the hidden world of Palpigrades, which is the first ever Arachnological Society plenary lecture to feature these remarkable arachnids. Erhard described some interesting features of these creatures, such as their apparent ability to ingest cyanobacteria and the fact that there are many places in the world where palpigrade species have not yet been characterised. Very interestingly the talk also emphasised several people who had been involved in early studies of this group of animals. This included Augusta Rucker, a prominent researcher in the field of palpigrade morphology and development, who later went on to become a medical doctor and the founder of modern pediatric medicine.



Congress sessions in the Aula Magna



The afternoon saw a second plenary talk, given by Gustavo Hormiga, who described the evolutionary history of orb-weaving spiders in light of data acquired using new genetic tools. This was followed by an equally excellent presentation given by Jason Bond, using different genetic approaches to tackle related evolutionary questions. Before and after this second plenary we were treated to talks on topics such as the factors determining current distributions of mygalomorphs (Arthur Decae) and cave-dwelling pholcids (Shlomi Aharon), observations on invasive species (Cor Vink) and the diversity of morphological features seen in particular scorpions (Victor Fet).

A particular highlight of the conference was a talk on the new Italian spider checklist with a special focus on endemic species given by the conference organizer, Marco Isaia himself. During this presentation alert members of the audience may have noticed the fun photo of the organizing group that had been inserted into Marco's talk without his prior knowledge! The new Italian spider checklist is already available online on the website of the Natural History Museum of Bergamo ([www.museoscienzebergamo.it](http://www.museoscienzebergamo.it), section "ricerche/aracnidi"). The afternoon also treated us to a colourful array of talks on subjects such as solifugid systematics, with special comments on the perils of trying to work with these animals (Paula Cushing), and molecular evolutionary studies of groups such as dysderids (Miquel Arnedo), trapdoor spiders (Vera Opatova) and *Buthus* scorpions (Pedro Sousa).

The final day of the conference began with a very interesting plenary by Frederick Hendrickx, who divulged some of the secrets of *Oedothorax* and the basis for the persistence of different male head morphs within a single species. Female mating preferences, differences in maturation times and mating rates of the two male head types all appear to work to maintain both morphs within a population. Work to unravel the genetic basis for the two different morphs is currently in progress.

Frederick's talk was followed by two symposia – the first on mating strategies and the second on spider genomics. Christina Tuni spoke about sexual selection in *Pisaura*, Jutta Schneider spoke about mating strategies in *Argiope*, and there was a fascinating insight into sensation (or absence of!) in spider genitalia by Peter Michalik. Trine Bilde introduced the genomics symposium, describing how entire genome sequencing is now within reach for spiders, a *Stegodyphus* genome recently having been published. Virginia Settepani spoke about the predicted genetic consequences of sociality being

inbreeding, and gave empirical evidence from *Stegodyphus* to support this.

Jesper Bechsgaard and Bram Vanthournout both gave presentations that looked at the relationship between spiders and their response to microbial organisms. Chris Hamilton and Nicole Garrison both gave very interesting talks on different genetic approaches to delimiting species boundaries. It was an excellent set of talks to end a fascinating day.

### Arachnologists Can Party

As has now become a firm tradition, the famous 'Russian party' took place on the penultimate



The Russian Party

evening of the conference. The food and drink brought by Yuri Marusik, his wife and colleagues was absolutely amazing, and a fantastic complement to the spirits from all over the world that suddenly appeared. We ate and drank to the accompanying music played by DJ Toy-Fel. He coped admirably with such a large number of dancing arachnologists – who happily mixed a diverse range of dancing styles in a unique and unforgettable way. (A bit like the blends of alcohol.)

The congress excursions took place after two full days of conference talks, and allowed for relaxation or hard hiking – depending on which tour participants had selected. The toughest trip involved a hike up to the Rifugio Questa in the Alpi Marittime National Park. Participants on this tour were fortunate to encounter several individuals of *Vesubia jugorum*, a rare lycosid species, which became a real talking point. Others (myself included) opted for a more leisurely hike in the Alpi Marittime,



The hard hike at Rifugio Questa (Natural Park of Alpi Marittime)



to the Royal Hunting Lodge where we were served a delicious meal, which we enjoyed in the sunshine. Further tours were enjoyed to the Venaria royal residence and Mandria National Park, and a wine tasting excursion took place to the Langhe region, with the opportunity to explore the wine region ...in all senses.



On the way to the Royal Hunting Lodge (Natural Park of Alpi Marittime)



The Venaria Royal Residence



Wine tasting in the Langhe Region

The final evening saw the congress meeting, at which a number of important things were decided, such as the election of our new president, Wolfgang Nentwig. Christian Kropf also informed us that the Natural History Museum, Bern will now host the World Spider Catalogue. Free access to the taxonomic literature will be available to individuals who register to become members.

The awards ceremony is always a highlight of the final congress meeting, where the excellence of the science that we have encountered during the week is celebrated. The talks and posters were all of a very high standard and the judging committee had a difficult task to select winners. The winning student talks were those given by Nicole Garrison, Vera Opatova and Katrin Kunz and the winning posters were those presented by Anne-Sarah Ganske, Gustavo de Miranda and Gordana Grbic. Congratulations to all the winners!

The awards ceremony was not only for talks and posters but also for photography. It must have been incredibly difficult to choose a winner from the submitted contributions but the winning photograph was Peter Koomen's 'Spotted by Spider', a truly fantastic photo. The award was made by *Skua Nature Group*, an Italian company dealing with research, conservation and travel tourism. The prize was a trip offered by *Skua* to *Ultima Frontiera*, a private reserve in the Danube delta, an area of outstanding natural beauty that is designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage site and Biosphere Reserve.



ECA2014 Photo Contest - Peter Koomen

Peter Koomen's photo, winner of the ECA2014 Photo Contest

After the ceremony there was just enough time to make our way to the Esperia rowing club by the Po river, where a delicious meal was waiting for us. The lights of Torino reflecting on the river formed a beautiful backdrop to our meal, which ended with musical accompaniment courtesy of DJ Alman. It was a lovely end to the week.

Our thanks go to the organisers of the congress – particularly Marco Isaia – for hosting us all so well and for providing such a good environment in which to talk about spider science – and much else besides. The huge round of applause at the end of the assembly says it all – thank you Marco and your team for everything you have done - we will all no doubt be back next year.



## News from ESA general assembly

By Efrat Gavish-Regev

The President (Ferenc Samu) opened the General Assembly by reminding us of the Society's aims, which are to support European arachnological projects, to facilitate congress proceedings, to assist the attendance of students at meetings and to carry out the every-day functions of the council.

Ferenc gave an update to the assembly on the implementation of a new membership policy, which is as follows: 1) payment deadline by 1<sup>st</sup> of February; 2) new payment method via PayPal, which will exist in addition to the already established methods of pre-payment during congresses, payment by bank transfer, via the British Arachnological Society (but not other societies), or by sending the money in registered mail; 3) waived fees under specific council criteria; 4) cancellation of membership after three consecutive years of no payment; 5) cross-checking membership in congress registration; and 6) personal yearly statements of membership payments.

The new membership policy helps the council to better manage the membership issues and has led to an increase in the number of paying members from approximately 60 in 2011 to more than 120 in 2014. This leads to a better financial state of the society that enables higher support of European projects such as the 'Araneae Spiders of Europe' (from 300 and 500 euros in 2011 and 2012 respectively, to 1000 euros per year in 2013 and 2014) and the congress proceedings in *Arachnologische Mitteilungen* (AraMit).

The Treasurer (Christian Kropf) reminded the meeting that the Society's account is now held in Switzerland where there are more favourable account conditions. There was a balance of 3860 Swiss Francs after the meeting in Taiwan (August 2013), membership payments for 2014 were 3533 Swiss Francs, and, after supporting conference proceedings (AraMit) and 'Araneae Spiders of Europe', a balance of 5915 Swiss Francs remained as of the end of July 2014. The treasurer's report was accepted by Peter Horak on behalf of the auditors. The president shared with the assembly that the council had approached several members regarding the venue of future congresses, and that the congress organizer and venue for next year would be announced soon after the meeting (see announcements in this newsletter).

The assembly remembered with a moment of silence five arachnologists who have passed away during 2013, three of whom were members of the Society: Joachim Haupt, Jean-Claude Ledoux, Herman Dekoninck, and two non-member European arachnologists: Albeius Kessler and Asta Vilbaste. The president announced three new honorary members (bringing the total to 14): these were one of the Society's founders, Roland Stockmann (France), and two additional well known and active members Jörg Wunderlich (Germany) and Torbjörn Kronstedt (Sweden).

The elections to council resulted in the re-election of Maria Chatzaki, Holger Frick, Efrat Gavish-Regev and Ferenc Samu in addition to the other seven serving members. The assembly meeting was then closed with a vote of thanks to Marco and his team for hosting such an excellent congress, and to Ferenc Samu for all his efforts during the last 9 years as President of the European Society of Arachnology. It was proposed that Wolfgang Nentwig be the next president. This was accepted unanimously. Theo Blick confirmed during the closing ceremony that the congress proceedings will be published in AraMit. Further details of the General Assembly can be found on the Society website.

## Announcements

- **2015 The 29th European Congress of Arachnology** will be hosted by Stano Pekar in Brno, Czech Republic from the 24<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> August.
- **2016 The 20th International Congress of Arachnology (ICA 2016)** will be hosted by Paula Cushing, and held in Golden, Colorado. From July 2nd-9<sup>th</sup>. This will be a joint meeting between AAS (American Arachnological Society) and ISA (the International Congress).
- **2017 The 30th European Congress of Arachnology** will be held in Nottingham, United Kingdom (Organizer: Sara Goodacre).
- **2018 The 31st European Congress of Arachnology**: open
- **2019 The 21st International Congress of Arachnology**: open
- **2020 The 32nd European Congress of Arachnology**: in Greifswald, Germany (Organizers: Gabriele Uhl and Peter Michalik).

