Preface to the section of the Proceedings of the 27th European Congress of Arachnology, Ljubljana, 2012 Sept. 2-7 (pp. 4-20)

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Almost four years ago, during the 2009 congress in Greece, I was called away from the Russian party only to be cornered by the esteemed colleagues of the ESA council and be asked the unnerving question, to which, of course, a negative response was not an option: "Matjaž, how would you feel about organizing a future European congress"? Three years later, in September 2012, not only European arachnologists, but also many overseas col-



leagues came to Ljubljana with huge expectations from me and my crowd of enthusiastic, yet inexperienced, sidekicks, of which only one was a professional researcher, and the rest were graduate or undergraduate students. 2012 was a recession year, and with hundreds of our letters asking for sponsorship of this "unique and prestigious scientific event" ignored (though with a handful of exceptions, see below), we had to pull the event off on a shoestring. We did, however, keep the fees low for numerous colleagues to be able to attend, and in addition we sponsored an unprecedented number of students that would otherwise be unable to attend the meeting; no fewer than 30 lucky international students were thus awarded grants that in addition to waived fees also covered their accommodation.

And so we (EZ lab) hosted, at the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) in Ljubljana, between 2nd and 7th September 2012, 156 colleagues from 39 countries. The participants represented most European countries, and those from further afield came from Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, USA, Algeria, India, Pakistan, Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore and Australia. As people told us, the congress was a lot of fun.

The event would never have been possible without the amazing help from my EZ Lab

organizing team. Thank you Matjaž Gregorič, Ren-Chung Cheng, Nina Vidergar, Klemen Candek, Urška Pristovšek and Miha Pipan, who made the impossible things work, with further help coming from Olga Kardoš, Martin Turjak, Tea Knapič, Klavdija Suen and selected student grantees. I am also indebted to the wonderful scientific committee, Drs. Simona Kralj-Fišer, Ingi Agnarsson, Christian Kropf, Daiqin Li and Miquel Arnedo. These colleagues helped me select and invite four outstanding plenary speakers from around the World. We were privileged to welcome and listen to the lectures of Jason Bond (Auburn University, USA) on integrative approaches to delimiting species and taxonomy, Fiona Cross (University of Canterbury, New Zealand) on olfaction based behaviour of a mosquito-eating, and thus blood-sucking, jumping spider from Africa, Eileen Hebets (University of Nebraska, USA) on interacting traits and secret senses in arachnids, proposing them as model organisms in studying behavioural evolution and Fritz Vollrath (University of Oxford, UK), who spoke of the secrets of silk. These lectures were all fascinating and of high scientific value. Most of them can be viewed online at http://videolectures.net/eca2012_ljubljana/.

We grouped the presentations into logical sessions, some of which had to be parallel, with

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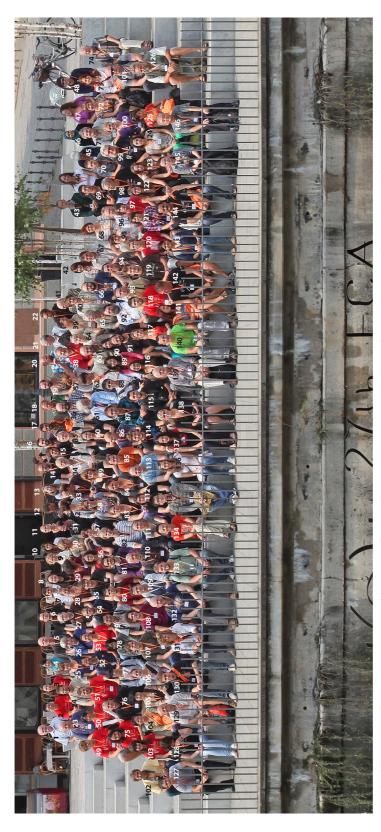
non-overlapping presentations of the students competing for awards. With the help of Wolfgang Nentwig we also organized a symposium on DNA barcoding, where longer introductory talks by Miquel Arnedo, Ingi Agnarsson and Jeremy Miller introduced the concepts and recent practices in discovering, delimiting and inventorying species using DNA barcodes, while more specific presentations introduced recent European barcoding initiatives. There were also two poster sessions, and many social events. We congratulate again those students who won awards, kindly provided by our sponsors, although the selection amongst many high quality student presentations was difficult. Within the broad category "Systematics and Evolution", the awarded oral presentations were those of Henrik Krehenwinkel (1), Elisabeth Lipke (2) and Marija Majer (3), the awarded posters were those of Jana Plíšková (1), Susanne Meese (2) and Cheng-Ya Chang (3). Within the category "Ecology and Behavior" the awards for oral presentations went to Katrin Kunz (1), Shazia Quasin (2) and Reiner Neumann (3), while those for posters went to Urška Pristovšek (1), Hsien-Chun Liao (2) and Klaas Welke (3).

The main congress sponsors in addition to the European Society of Arachnology were the Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (http://www.zrc-sazu.si/) and its EZ Lab (http://ezlab.zrc-sazu.si/), the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (http://www.sazu.si/en/o-sazu.html) and the Slovenian Research Agency (http://www.arrs.gov.si/en/dobrodoslica.asp). Further generous sponsorships came from Pensoft (http://www.pensoft.net/), Bioform (https://www.bioform.de/), the British Arachnological Society (http://britishspiders.org.uk/), the American Arachnological Society (http://americanarachnology.org/) and the Arachnologische Gesellschaft (http://arages.de/).

Finally, although the congress saw numerous talks and posters (the Abstract book can be downloaded at http://ezlab.zrc-sazu.si/eca2012#abstracts), the future of the proceedings from the European Congress of Arachnology may be bleak, as no more than five manuscripts in total were submitted from the Ljubljana congress, of which three withstood peer review and were evaluated as appropriate for publication. Perhaps it's time for the society to reconsider the future of publishing presentations from the congresses in manuscript form, but rather move towards publishing and indexing only presentation abstracts.

Matjaž Kuntner, Ljubljana

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