

Preface to the Proceedings of the 31th European Congress of Arachnology, Vác, Hungary, 2018 July 8-13

The Congress, covering the whole breadth of arachnology, was organised over four days with scientific sessions and an additional mid-congress excursion day. Hungarian arachnologists, a well forged community of professionals and amateurs, organised the event in co-operation with the Hungarian Ecological Society and the Centre for Agricultural Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The host town for the Congress was Vác, which is a small historic town located on the left bank of the Danube, 30 km north of Budapest, making transportation quite convenient. Because of its intact main square and surrounding historic quarter of zig-zagging small streets the town is rightfully called a “baroque treasure box”. Vác is a religious centre and seat for one of the catholic archbishops. In fact, the stairs of the main church, the Cathedral, gave the best opportunity for the congress photo. With its promenade, water sports life and ferry to the Szentendre Island, town-life is strongly connected to the Danube. Vác is also the gate for the famous Danube Bend, where the river takes a 180° turn to break through between the Pilis and Börzsöny Mountains. The angle shaped Danube Bend inspired the Congress logo, which reminded its designer, Éva Szita, of the fractional orb web of *Hyptiotes paradoxus*. On the logo this triangular-shaped web is framed by the Danube – the threads meeting at Vác – with the uloborid spider perching on the signal thread.

The Congress venue was provided by the Apor Vilmos Catholic College, a teacher training college, located centrally in the old town of Vác. The College had modest but very welcoming facilities, all on-site, from auditoria to student housing, a canteen and a lovely shaded inner yard for relaxation and coffee breaks. The organization needed quite a team. Core organizers (Ferenc Samu chair, Csaba Szinetár co-chair, Tamás Szűts scientific organizer, Éva Szita and László Mezőfi logistics, Zsolt Szabó secretary) were helped by some 20 volunteers, who did everything from IT, to making coffee, getting fresh fruit and pastries from the local market and bakery, guided tours, documenting events and administration.

We had 133 participants from all over the world (27 countries). With the help of sponsors and mutual agreements between societies we could give free registration and various discounts to over 20 student attendants. The scientific program (to our judgement) nicely matched the available time. There were no parallel sessions, but no unnecessary gaps either. We had 58 oral and 53 poster presentations, of which nearly half was given by students. The opening ceremony, following a tradition that started in Nottingham, eased the audience to the more serious program by a brief introduction to the natural values of the Danube Bend, followed by showing “arachnologists in their natural habitats” through the lively social photos of Christian Komposch.

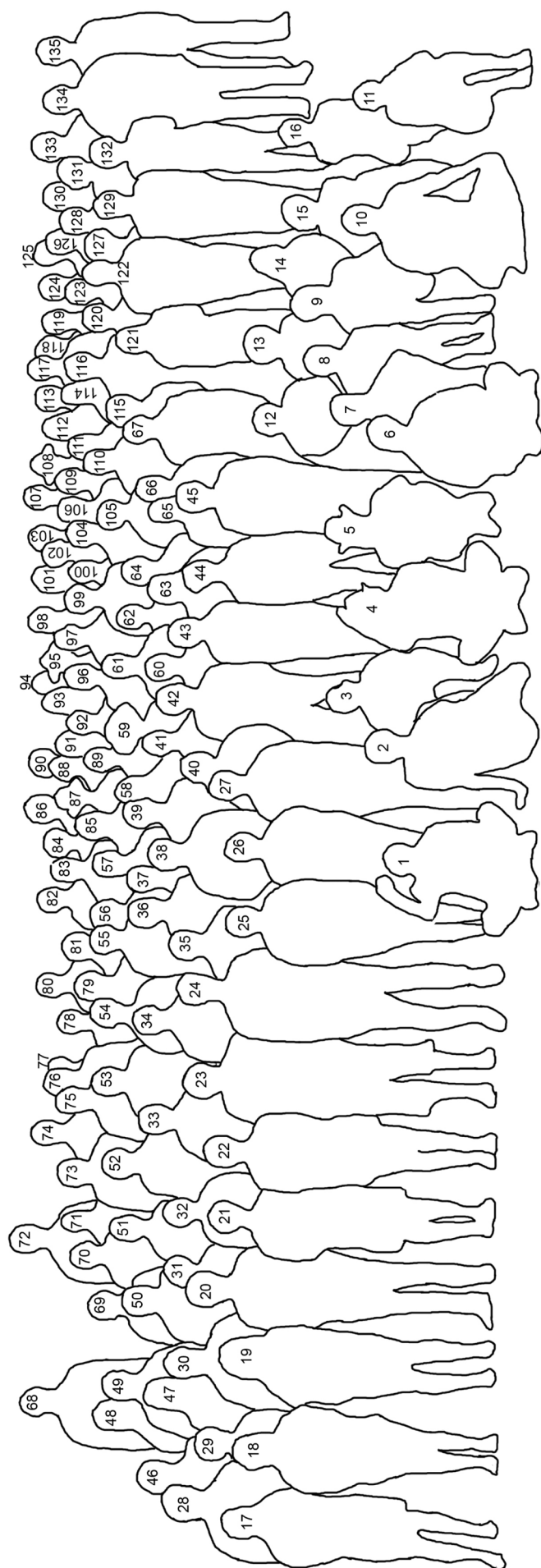
We managed to invite excellent plenary speakers, whose themes gave the main topical anchor points to the scientific sessions. The first day, Monday, was largely a “molecular day”, marked by the keynote lecture of Rosa Fernandez. She summarised the largest invertebrate phylogenomic analyses to



date, done in her lab, which synergistically with comparative transcriptomics and lineage diversification analyses aspires to build a robust backbone for the Spider Tree of Life. A session on spider silk joined the day’s molecular theme, spiced by a talk on webs and soft robotics by Fritz Vollrath. A special symposium on spider distributions, organised by Yuri Marusik, closed Monday. Tuesday was more distinguished by spider behaviour, introduced by the plenary talk of Jutta Schneider, who reported on an impressive line of experiments concerning sex specific life-history and mating strategies in *Nephila*. Further themes of the day were spider feeding both at the behavioural and at the food-web level. Spider have tales to tell, well, actually about the tail of one of their ancestors. This ancient peculiar spider proved to be a link between true spiders and the extinct Uraraneida. This intriguing story was told in Thursday’s plenary talk by Paul Selden, followed up by sessions on arachnid evolutionary tricks and environmental issues. On the closing day Christian Wirkner delivered a keynote speech on the evolutionary morphology of chelicerates, not just to show the diversity of research areas arachnology encompasses, but also to demonstrate the utility of astonishing technical revolutions allowing virtual three-dimensional analyses of the internal anatomy of animals, especially if they join together with the use of rigorous, theoretically based dictionaries. Further morphological talks were followed by ecological sessions that included research in both above ground and below ground habitats.

The Congress was also rich in extracurricular activities. In fact, so rich, that we had three early morning programs, including a walk on the Danube river bank flood-forest path, dragon boating and an early visit to the thriving local market of Vác. The evening programs were more in line with arachnology congress traditions. We had a sightseeing tour followed





1. Ferenc Samu, 2. Jan Raška, 3. Francesco Ballarin, 4. Vladimir Hula, 5. Igor Armiaich Steimpress, 6. Michelle Strickland, 7. Danilo Harms, 8. Ellen Akkersdijk, 9. Fritz Vollrath, 10. Peter Koomen, 11. Kristýna Kysilková, 12. Theo Blick, 13. Christian Wirkner, 14. Sara Goodacre, 15. Christian Komposch, 16. Ludmila Černecká, 17. Luca Török, 8. Katinka Battányi, 19. Szilvia Mezőfi, 20. László Mezőfi, 21. Anna Nekhaeva, 2. Irina Marusik, 23. Yuri Marusik, 24. András Márton Rákóczi, 25. Erika Botos, 26. Éva Szita, 27. Zsuzsanna Pál, 28. Csaba Szinetár, 29. Teréz Márkus, 30. Dávid Fülöp, 31. Kashmeera Neisseril, 32. Driya Mohan Ovatt, 33. Maija Stokmane, 34. Sumesh Njarekkattil, 35. Puthoor Pattammal Sudhin, 36. Ambalaparambil Vasu Sudhikumar, 37. Eva Liznarova, 38. Karunnappilli Shamsudheen Nafin, 39. Łukasz Trębicki, 40. Hardeep Kaur, 41. Tanya Levy, 42. Roman Bucher, 43. Laia Mestre, 44. Yael Lubin, 45. Maria del Carmen Viera, 46. László Bali, 47. Angelika Dawidowicz, 48. Lenka Sentenska, 49. Konrad Wiśniewski, 50. Rodica Plaiasu, 51. Karin Urfer, 52. Miriam Frutiger, 53. Holger Frick, 54. Stefano Mammola, 55. Zoë Simmons, 56. Maura Selden, 57. Steven Williams, 58. Martina Magris, 59. Sarah J. Kariko, 60. Nirit Assaf, 61. Dan Rossman, 62. Yun-Yun Tsai, 63. Efrat Gavish-Regev, 64. Radek Michalko, 65. Antje Hundertmark, 66. Charlotte Deall, 67. Ella Deutsch, 68. Tamás Szűts, 69. Ejgil Gravesen, 70. Gábor Merza, 71. Joanna Krawczuk, 72. Grzegorz Krawczyk, 73. Samuel Danflous, 74. Matthias Foellmer, 75. Matjaž Gregorič, 76. Robert Bosmans, 77. Zsolt Szabó, 78. Marij Decler, 79. Paul Selden, 80. Ondřej Michálek, 81. Lucia Kuhn-Nentwig, 82. Siegfried Huber, 83. Arthur Decae, 84. Wolfgang Nentwig, 85. Dimitar Dimitrov, 86. Christian Kropf, 87. Nollie Hallensleben, 88. Heli Hurme, 89. Martina Pavlek, 90. Jakob Walter, 91. Elisabeth Bauchhenss, 92. Marco Isaia, 93. Steppo Koponen, 94. Róbert Gallé, 95. Jörg Wunderlich, 96. Samuel Zschokke, 97. Gábor Kovács, 98. Filippo Milano, 99. Vladislav Ivanov, 100. Roland Horváth, 101. István Urák, 102. Tóthmész Béla, 103. Morgan Thornber, 104. Søren Toft, 105. Peter van Helsing, 106. Csaba Nagy, 107. Gabriel Kirchmair, 108. Tristan Canterbury, 109. Miriam Schaidler, 110. Alessio Trotta, 111. Alice Guenther, 112. Jens Runge, 113. Maryás Hiirna, 114. Rebecca Heidbrink, 115. Jurta Schneider, 116. Alastair Gibbons, 117. Petr Dolejš, 118. Ho Yin Yip, 119. Milan Řezáč, 120. Wan Yu Wu, 121. Narmin Beydzade, 122. Dakota Piotrowski, 123. Anna Moravcová, 124. Vlastimil Růžicka, 125. Stanislav Pekár, 126. Matěj Koz, 127. Ming-Yu Lee, 128. Pavel Just, 129. Prokop Košítko, 130. Pavla Dudová, 131. Tomáš Hamřík, 132. Kristína Štěpánková, 133. Peter Gajdoš, 134. Jirí Král, 135. Kapilkumar Ingle – Photo: Tamás Török

by pub-crawling (to give a different perspective), a memorable Russian party that was nearly washed away by a thunderstorm – but luckily a basement student club provided shelter to the event. Unfortunately the rain stuck to our social programs, which made the mid-congress tour quite tricky. Eventually all three tours, the one to the Börzsöny Mountains, another to the Szentendre Island and the third to the Visegrád castle coped with the weather in good spirits and joined together in the evening in the dark forests of Börzsöny for a goulash cooked on an open fire. Luckily the Congress dinner was not only delightful, but also free from weather extremities, allowing for a late evening fierce folk dancing in the yard of the restaurant.

At the end of the meeting, as part of the closing ceremony, the audience could watch a short video about the most memorable events of the Congress. After that we celebrated the

best student presentations and posters during an award ceremony. Jens Runge (Germany, first prize for best talk), Ondřej Michálek (Czech Republic, second best talk), Filippo Milano (Italy, third best talk), Pavla Dudová (Czech Republic, first prize for best poster), Yun-Yun Tsai (Czech Republic, second best poster) and Rebecca Heidbrink (Germany, third best poster) were the winners this year. Réka Ágota Szabó (Romania) was the winner of the Special Prize of the National Geographic Hungary. Congratulations!

We thank everyone who took part in the meeting and we hope to meet many colleagues at next years' congresses!

Ferenc SAMU