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On: 13 February 2014, At: 13:34

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

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Journal of Natural History

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tnah20>

Preface

Published online: 21 Feb 2007.

To cite this article: (2006) Preface, Journal of Natural History, 40:15-16, 867-871, DOI: [10.1080/00222930600833768](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00222930600833768)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00222930600833768>

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Preface



This volume is dedicated to Professor John J. McDermott whose nearly 50 years of research in different areas of marine biology, which have included ground-breaking studies of nemertean feeding behavior and ecology, inspired many others to pursue the mysteries of nemertinology.

“...it may be doubted if there are any other animals which have played such an important part in the history of the world as these lowly organized creatures.” Charles Darwin

In his tribute to earthworms, Darwin appreciated their critical role in the environment, and, since then, biologists have expanded our knowledge of these and other annelids. Similarly, a small group of biologists has dedicated their research efforts to enhancing our understanding of another group of worms, the remarkable nemerteans. Thus, this 6th International Conference on Nemertean Biology was organized to continue the momentum generated through the previous five conferences, which were held in Philadelphia, PA, USA (1983), Tjärnö Marine Biological Laboratory, Sweden (1986), Bangor, Wales (1991), Pacific Grove, CA, USA (1995) and Alcalá de Henares, Spain, (2000). The motivation amongst the veteran nemertean biologists, besides furthering our knowledge of these important animals, is sharing information and recruiting a new generation of biologists who will continue research on nemerteans. The newcomers to this conference were Rebecca Ritger, James Andreassi and Tristan Carland from the Smithsonian Institution and Alex Seitz, the only European to cross the Atlantic, from Germany.

The conference convened at Weber State University, Ogdén, UT, USA on the 21st June 2004. Twenty participants were in attendance. The two-day conference was divided into two sessions. Nine papers were presented during the first session—on phylogeny, systematics and taxonomy. Seven papers were presented in the second session—on behaviour, ecology and physiology. Sichun Sun was unable to attend and Jon Norenburg read his paper. Although there was some apprehension about having an international conference in a geographical area away from the coast with no previous reported sightings of ribbon worms, the consensus among participants was that the meeting, in this informal setting, was successful and exceptionally conducive to stimulating critical discussion, generating thought-provoking questions and encouraging one-to-one exchanges of observations and ideas. Perhaps, the beautiful Wasatch Mountains, the clean air and clear blue skies, the small size of the group, as well as the good food and convivial spirits more than compensated for lack of the windy, salt-air or ribbon worms crawling in the foggy intertidal. Prior to the conference, a one-day workshop on developing a nemertean list-server and personal pages on the Smithsonian Institution Nemertes website was attended by 12 participants and resulted in numerous constructive suggestions for supplementing this important resource for nemertean biologists.

After the conference, about 15 months have been busily spent completing manuscripts, going through the review process and undertaking final revisions. During this period, the guest editors have exchanged frequent emails, read and learned about many interesting aspects of nemertean biology, and developed mind-sets for nuances of the minute details. In all these activities, we have appreciated the efforts of the authors, including their perseverance and patience, and we are especially grateful to the reviewers for their time, intellectual guidance and full cooperation during this demanding process.

The organizers would like to thank Diego and Cristina Bernal, Terry Cook, Phillip Gray, Susan Gurr, Cindy Harris-Ford, Shana Hess, Ty Leverich, Prasanna Reddy, Lionel Romero, Joshua Spendlove and Craig Steinmetz for their help. The organizers are grateful to Mary McKinley and Shauna Ross of the Ogden Nature Center for their hospitality. James Andreassi and Tristan Carland provided superb technical assistance with computers and video projectors during the oral presentations.

In this volume, 10 of the 16 papers presented at the conference are included. These 10 papers were peer-reviewed by two referees and the guest editors. Final decision for inclusion in this volume was based on the recommendations of the referees, and the scientific merit, quality and relevance of the research. The guest editors are appreciative of the many colleagues who took part in this process: Frank Crandall, Ray Gibson, Amro Hamdoun, Mikael Härlin, Juan Junoy, Svetlana Maslakova, John McDermott, Janet Moore, Nathan Pete Riser, Pamela Roe, Cynthia Santos, Jeffrey Shields, Jeffrey Spees, Steve Stricker, Per Sundberg and Martin Thiel. The guest editors are grateful for the assistance provided by Colleen Bagley and Lindy Worden during the organization of the manuscripts. Finally, we thank Dr. P. J. Hayward, editor of the *Journal of Natural History* for expediting the publication of the proceedings.

The organizers are grateful for the logistical and financial support provided by the following persons from Weber State University: Teri Wood-Slaughter, Director of Conference Service, Dr Samuel Zeveloff, Chair of the Department of Zoology, Dr J. Ronald Galli and Dr Dale Ostlie, Dean of the College of Science, Dr John Cavitt, Director of Undergraduate Research, and Dr. Kathleen Lukken, Associate Provost. This conference was funded by a Hemingway Faculty Excellence Award from the Research, Scholarship and Professional Growth of Weber State University.

The organizers thank all of the participants who took time and expense to attend the conference. Their infectious enthusiasm for this important but under-studied group of “lowly worms”, their research efforts and their friendship are greatly appreciated. As the saying goes, a successful conference is not due to the venue and setting but to the involvement of the participants! We wish Cynthia Santos our best in her plans to host the 7th International Conference at Ilha Bella, Brazil, in 2008.

Ogden, Utah, December 2005

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Group photo

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