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PREFACE

The 24th European Congress of Arachnology took place in Bern, Switzerland, from 25th–29th August 2008 in the historic main building of the University. It was jointly organised by the Natural History Museum Bern (Christian Kropf) and the University of Bern (Wolfgang Nentwig and Martin Entling). This congress was the largest European Congress of Arachnology ever held (Fig. 1). We received 180 registrations from 34 countries and from all continents. For a long time the arachnological community was a small community and the Edinburgh congress in 1997 was the first with more than 100 participants. Since then all congresses were in the range of 100–150 participants, indicating a growing scientific community and an increasing interest in and importance of arachnology.

The Bern congress started with a two day pre-congress workshop on data analysis in spider ecology, held by Efrat Gavish-Regev, Karin Nadrowski and Klaus Birkhofer, with 18 participants from nine countries. Participants and lecturers were kindly supported by the Mittelbauvereinigung der Universität Bern. At the main congress, four keynote speakers reported on the recent development in their area of research: Christoph Muster on phylogeographic studies in spiders, Trine Bilde on kin selection and sexual selection in cooperative spiders, Pierre Escoubas on spider venoms as deadly cocktails but also drug lead libraries, and Soeren Toft on the role of nutrition in spider physiology, behaviour and ecology. The oral contributions were grouped in symposia. The first and outstanding Carl Clerck symposium on systematics of spiders comprised 15 oral contributions and was sponsored by the Linnean Society of London. Further symposia concerned dispersal of spiders (4 oral contributions), scorpions and smaller arachnid orders (9), ecology and evolution (9), behaviour (5), toxicology and physiology (4), agroecology (6), biogeography and faunistics (10), and conservation and management (7). Most talks were given in the large *Cupiennius* auditory, and only the symposium on biogeography and faunistics had to be held in the nearby *Argiope* hall. Thus, parallel sessions could largely be avoided. In addition to the four keynote talks, 69 oral contributions and 49 posters were presented, resulting in a total of 122 presentations. Additionally, the European and six national arachnological societies presented themselves with a poster. We also integrated into the plenum programme a vernissage for four book, two short film presentations, and one photo exhibition.

To award the best talks and posters from young scientists and the best photos, we selected three juries with 19 persons (many thanks for your support). According to their decision, the winners of the photo award are Carsten Kamenz (first price), Mauro Paschetta (second price) and Beata Eichenberger (third price). The winners of the "Young scientist award for outstanding talks" are Martina Hrušková-Martišová (first price), Kajsa Mellbrand (second price), and Holger Frick (third price). The winners of the "Young scientist award for outstanding posters" are Angelo Bolzern (first price), Stanislav Korenko (second price), and Axel Schönhofer (third price). The photo award was sponsored by the Arachnologische Gesellschaft, the "Young scientist award for outstanding talks" was sponsored by the European Society of Arachnology and the University of Bern, and the "Young scientist award for

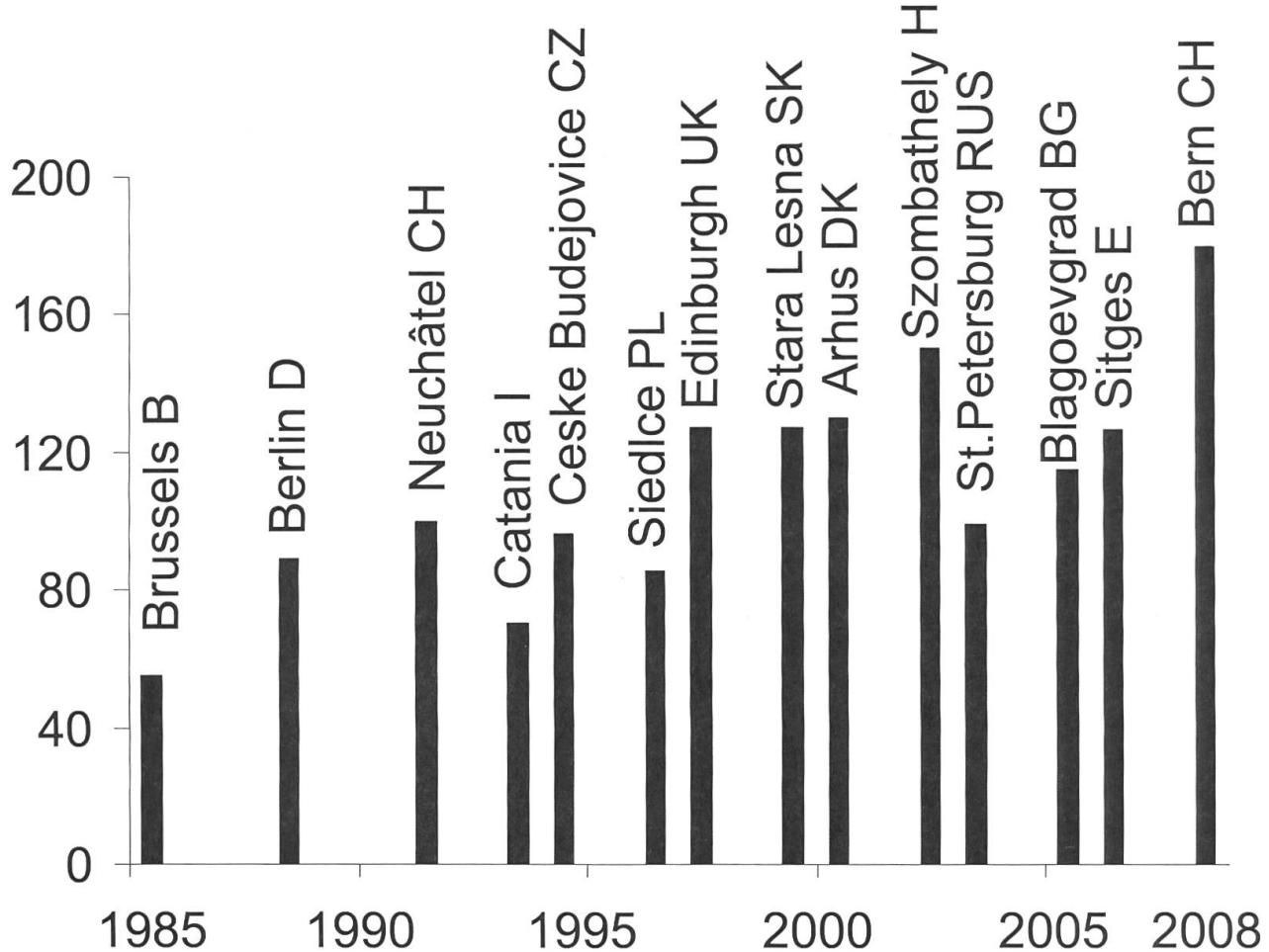


Fig. 1. Numbers of participants of European Congresses of Arachnology since 1985. Numbers of participants are not known for the congresses in Rennes (1987) and Paris (1990).

outstanding posters" was sponsored by the British Arachnological Society. The price sums for the three prices were 250, 150 and 100 Euro for each award.

The culinary frame programme of our congress needs a special reference. We started in the evening of the registration day with a meeting in the restaurant of the Old Tramdepot in the historic city of Bern. On the three days with full congress programme we were able to provide a full lunch besides the coffee and tea breaks. On Monday evening we were welcomed by the mayor of the City of Bern in the historic town hall and enjoyed the dinner he offered us before we started to a guided city tour in Bern, a UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site. On Tuesday, an exciting congress dinner was offered in the Natural History Museum Bern, also opening its exhibitions to the participants. During the Wednesday congress excursion to the Alps we received lunch packages and in the evening we enjoyed the Russian party. This traditional event had happened in a very spontaneous manner at the previous arachnological congresses and in Bern it was for the first time incorporated into the official congress programme. Others may decide whether this is an advantage or not, at least the quantity and quality of alcohol available topped all previous events. Finally, we have to mention the special congress beer which was brewed on the occasion of our congress. The participants drank 400 bottles offered with four different labels showing four spiders which are currently very important in our research groups (the oonopid *Ischnothyreus* sp., the anapid *Comaroma simonii*, the linyphiid *Caracladus zamoniensis*, and the ctenid *Cupiennius salei*).

The traditional congress excursion led us into the Gantrisch area one hour distant from Bern which offers an exciting alpine landscape that could be explored during hikes of varied difficulties from easy promenade to mountaineering. Some stayed at the Gantrisch hut or visited lake Gantrisch, while most did the circuit around mount Gantrisch, a 3 to 5 h walk. Another group of very ambitious mountaineers climbed the top of mount Gantrisch (2175 m).

Congresses are expensive for the participants but also for the organisers. Being in Switzerland, things easily tend to become even more expensive than anywhere else. When we offered some time ago to organize the 24th European Congress of Arachnology in Bern, we also promised to keep fees lower than some previous congresses. After all, we are glad to state that we managed to keep this promise. About one third of the total congress budget of 40.000 Euro could be raised from sponsors and we gratefully acknowledge this support. This enabled us to waive the congress fees for approximately 10 % of the congress participants. In addition, we were able to organize private accommodation for about 20 congress participants. Our thanks go to the Max and Elsa Beer-Brawand-Fonds of the University of Bern, to the Burgergemeinde Bern, to the City of Bern, to the Natural History Museum of Bern and the University of Bern. We thank the European Society of Arachnology, the Arachnologische Gesellschaft, the British Arachnological Society and the Linnean Society of London. We also thank the publishing houses of Springer, Spektrum, Elsevier and Pensoft. This congress had been professionally managed by KCS Convention Service and we thank Heike Kuhlmann for doing an excellent job. Special thanks go to Lucy Kuhn-Nentwig and Rita Schneider as central persons of the congress management and to the 25 helpers involved in the multiple aspects of such a congress. Above all, we thank all participants for making the congress such an inspiring and joyful experience.

Bern, January 2010

The organizers

Wolfgang Nentwig, Martin Entling, Christian Kropf

