

ICOM 3: a landmark in mycorrhiza research!

The Third International Conference on Mycorrhizas (ICOM 3) was held on 8–13 July 2001 at the prestigious Convention Centre of the beautiful city of Adelaide, South Australia. It was the first time in its early youth that the ICOM had been organised in the Southern Hemisphere. The location is of particular significance as it fully demonstrates that the mycorrhiza research community has its “mycorrhizal” roots all over the globe. Despite the long journey that many had to face, more than 400 participants joined this third ICOM.

Professor Sally Smith (University of Adelaide) and her whole team did their utmost to present us with an excellent conference. The overall organisation of the meeting was perfect and, on behalf of all in attendance, I thank Sally Smith, the local organising committee and the conference secretariat (Andrew Smith, Timothy Cavagnaro, Sandy Dickson, Debbie Miller, Youngguan Zhu, Ala Baklan, John Davey, Sally Jay) for making the meeting a big success.

For a complete overview of the scientific program, the reader is referred to the abstract book of the conference or to the website (http://www.waite.adelaide.edu.au/Soil_Water/Icom3-II/Program.html). About 80 talks and over 300 posters were presented on all aspects of mycorrhizal research. The idea to cover the different mycorrhizal types (ecto-, arbuscular and ericoid mycorrhiza) in the same sessions was much appreciated and should perhaps be copied in future meetings. It definitely promotes contact and exchange between researchers working with the different mycorrhizal types. Many very interesting contributions were presented by a new generation of young researchers.

The impact of molecular genetics has increased further since ICOM2 (Peterson 1999). Progress in this area has been remarkable as more and more genes are being characterised. It is clearly a challenge to integrate all of this new information into our understanding of the functioning of mycorrhizal symbioses in natural environments. Molecular techniques are now well established in ecological and phylogenetic studies with mycorrhizal fungi. More accurate population and community studies are being performed and even species identification of a few hyphae in roots and soil can become a routine technique in field studies. Important progress in unravelling

gene expression during the cross-talk between the mycorrhizal symbionts has been made, although it is clear that our weak grip on the AM fungal genes in roots remains a major problem.

It is a necessary evolution that powerful techniques developed in other disciplines of science are examined for their usefulness in mycorrhiza research. On the other hand, we must not neglect further development of traditional approaches that have shown their merits in the past. Studies integrating molecular and more classical approaches will clearly profit from this synergism.

Professor Michael Allen, who chaired the business session of the meeting, announced at the end of the conference that a new effort will be made to form an international association of mycorrhiza researchers. Such an association would certainly improve the visibility of mycorrhiza in the scientific community and could be most helpful to the organisers of future ICOM conferences. This idea was supported by the audience. A majority of the participants also agreed to accept the offer of Prof. André Fortin to host the 4th ICOM in Montreal, Canada in 2003. We are already looking forward to this event and wish to encourage the organisers in their engagement.

During the conference week, the new editorial board of *Mycorrhiza* met to discuss the future policy of the journal. The managing editor, Dr. Vivienne Gianinazzi-Pearson, informed the board about the evolution of submissions and acceptance rates of the papers. The quality of the papers published has markedly increased during the last years. This is indicated also by the continued increase in the impact factor of *Mycorrhiza* from 0.6 in 1997 to 1.28 in 2000 (ISI Journal Citation Reports). The journal has secured a solid position in the scene of scientific publications in its 10-year-old existence. Professor David Janos, managing editor for the Americas, announced his resignation. The members of the board expressed their thanks to David for his dedicated work for the journal. Professor Andrew Smith from the University of Adelaide generously accepted to take over the position and we wish him every success with this new challenge.

Reference

- Peterson L (1999) ICOM2 shows that mycorrhiza research is strong! *Mycorrhiza* 8:287–288