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EDITORIAL

'PROGRESS IN MOLECULAR STUDIES OF LICHENS' 11–14 AUGUST 1998

The concluding ten years of the millennium mark an important period in lichenology, as we look back to the decade in which molecular methods became standard in phylogenetic studies of lichens. The first polymerase chain reaction-based studies were presented to an international audience in Regensburg, 1990, and at that time no one could imagine how this field would develop. Meanwhile, considerable progress has been achieved by improved laboratory techniques, by the publicly available sequence data and by better knowledge of taxonomic groups. This encouraged many colleagues with a traditional background to start using molecular techniques. Those who are still planning to do so could learn a lot from the more experienced 'molecular lichenologists', while the latter would benefit from the broad experience of 'traditional taxonomists'. As the exchange of information between these groups is often limited to large congresses, we assumed it could be a valuable event for everybody to meet at a small workshop, dedicated to molecular lichenology.

This first workshop on molecular lichenology was organized by M. Grube, M. Wedin and P. Blanz. The Institute of Botany of the Karl-Franzens-University in Graz was considered an ideal place for such a meeting, with a newly established laboratory available, a rich lichen herbarium (GZU), and with interesting collecting localities close to the town. The response to our preliminary announcement was overwhelming and we soon realized that we were organizing a fully-fledged symposium to which almost all working groups in molecular lichenology sent representatives.

So we met in Graz on one of the hottest days in August 1998 to start a meeting, which benefited from intense discussions and the enthusiasm of leading young researchers. Fifty participants from 14 countries attended the workshop. Three different kinds of sessions were held: lectures, where current research was presented in a traditional way, discussion fora, where recent development and differing opinions were discussed, and laboratory seminars, where recent methodological progress was demonstrated in the laboratory. Additional research was presented during a poster session. At the end it became apparent that such a meeting can be only a snapshot of a rapidly evolving field. Soon, new perspectives will be opened up and additional genetic information will be used to address not only questions of phylogeny but will also be applied to elucidate the spectacular biology of lichenized ascomycetes. The contributions in this volume are a selection from both the lectures and the poster session.

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We are deeply grateful to Prof H. Teppner for allowing us to use the institute's infrastructure during the meeting. We wish to thank all the participants for their contributions. Special thanks to all whom assisted with the local organization, notably Ms U. Trinkaus. Ms U. Suppan, Ms M. Heftberger, Ms E. Hoffmann and Ms B. Komposch turned the breaks into culinary events. Finally we thank several organizations (Perkin Elmer, Steirische Landesregierung, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Österreichische Forschungsgemeinschaft, BMfWV, ÖGGGT) that supported our meeting financially.

We hope that similar events will take place somewhere in the near future.

M. Grube, M. Wedin and D. H. Brown