

Contributions to the  
Eleventh International Symposium on Flatworm Biology  
Diepenbeek (Belgium) 26-31 July 2009

## INTRODUCTION

The XIth International Symposium on Flatworm Biology closed half a century of symposia that focussed on turbellarian research. The first two of these were held in memory of two icons of turbellarian research: the "Libbie Hyman Memorial Symposium" (Chicago, 1970) and, seven years later, the "Alex Luther Memorial Symposium" (Tvaerminne, 1977). Three years later, the first open International Symposium on the Biology of Turbellaria was held (Diepenbeek, 1980) in honour of Tor Karling, a then still living legend in turbellarian biology. From that symposium on, an international Symposium on the Biology of Turbellaria was held every three or four years: Fredericton (Canada, 1984), Göttingen (Germany, 1987), Hirosaki (Japan, 1990); Turku (Finland, 1993), Brisbane (Australia, 1996) and Barcelona (Spain, 2000).

A short look at the abstract books and proceedings of these symposia already reveals the enormous evolution turbellarian research has gone through in all these years. Whereas most contributions in the first symposia focussed on classical morphology, taxonomy/systematics and ecology, the contributions in later symposia became more divers. With the trend set after the Brisbane symposium the symposia also covered more and more the parasitic flatworms. Contributions on stem cell biology and regeneration took a prominent place in most recent symposia, and the emergence of molecular techniques instigated new approaches in many fields of research. One of these insights led to an important change in the name of the symposia. The fact that phylogenetic analyses had clearly showed turbellarians to be paraphyletic, the Xth Symposium was called the Xth International Symposium on Flatworm Biology (ISFB). It was organised in Innsbruck by Reinhard Rieger and his group in 2006, after an interruption of seven years, reflecting Reinhard's broad interest and thorough knowledge in many fields of flatworm research, the symposium offered a wide variety of contributions. Unfortunately, Reinhard Rieger passed away a few months after the Innsbruck conference.

The XIth International Symposium of Flatworm Biology was organised in Diepenbeek (Belgium) from July 26-30, in memory of Reinhard. Coming from 18 different countries, 116 researchers attended the conference. The 42 oral contributions and 52 posters covered a broad field of subjects, from morphology, taxonomy and ecology over phylogeny to molecular signalling mechanisms, development and regeneration. Also several contributions were presented on parasitic (neodermatan) flatworm biology, which gave the opportunity to cross the "psychological border" between turbellarian and neodermatan researchers, leading to a fruitful exchange of ideas. The last day of the symposium was devoted to research on *Macrostomum* as the 3<sup>rd</sup> International *Macrostomum* meeting. This volume is not representative of the large number of contributions presented at the symposium but it clearly does represent the high diversity of topics.

The necessity of symposia as the XIth ISFB is, in our view, twofold: to give the state of the art in this field of research and to provide the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas. Especially for young researchers it is indispensable to discuss their results with experienced specialists. As in all former symposia, many young students attended the XIth ISFB. We are sure that the same will be true at the next ISFB, that will be held in Stockholm in 2012. Hopefully, the series can continue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, now that the younger generation has taken over.

Finally we wish to thank our sponsors and especially the Research Fondation Flanders for its financial support, the Province of Limburg and the City of Hasselt for their contribution in the social events during the symposium. The University of Hasselt is acknowledged for its support. Special thanks are due to the "crew" who made the symposium going smoothly and, last but not least, we thank Dr. Nikki Watson for correcting the manuscripts of the non-English speaking authors.