

THE ICPS CONFERENCE 2016

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This year the ICPS conference was held in Kew Gardens, London. The CPS had offered to host this event and our British friends did a lot of hard work to make this event possible. A very big thanks goes to them for pulling this off. I know that while the participants will not have noticed this, many things needed to be done, even up to the last moments, to make things run as smoothly as they did.

As for the conference itself, we had of course a great setting with the botanical garden. There was not much time to see the gardens themselves if you wanted to follow most of the lectures on a very full program.

The lectures were shorter than usual to allow more speakers to tell their story, and I feel a bit divided about that. I loved the lectures but not all fitted as well as others in 25 minutes instead of 45. For many I wanted to know more! There is a balance to be found here, though I'm not sure what that is.

The room we had for the lectures was nice and was just about full with about 160 participants, which is more than usual (Fig. 1). Previous conferences usually top out at 100-120 participants. I'm quite sure the location helped. Being in Europe and Kew's reputation might have pulled some people over the big drink. Several told me that they had wanted to visit Kew for a long time.

I would be interested to hear how Kew Gardens lived up to their expectations. It is a great park and a huge space, but in my personal opinion the quality of the collections and presentations is di-



Figure 1: Attendees at the 2016 ICPS conference held in Kew Gardens, London.

verse and ranges from very good to very disappointing. The displays I managed to visit seemed to underwrite this opinion formed on earlier visits.

Anyway, back to the conference. The room and the number of people also made for a hot environment and the need to open the back doors. We had very warm weather, something the UK is not known for, but does occur as those of us who were there can testify.

The participants got to listen to presentations that ranged across all kinds of topics and delivered by people that ranged from some of the most highly regarded speakers in the field to students. This last part was all in good ICPS tradition, as we make it a point to invite people at the earlier stages of their career to be part of the program.

I won't go into detail on all of the lectures, there were just too many of them. As for the ones I do mention, I'll be brief as I will never be a match for the original speaker. You'll just have to wait for the movies that got shot to be uploaded (and the articles to be printed from those who didn't want to be filmed, usually because some of the stuff they talked about wasn't ready to publish yet and that sort of reasons).

So, here is just a quick selection.

The first speaker was Fernando Rivadavia, filling in for Andreas Fleischmann who couldn't make it unfortunately. Essentially Fernando presented the huge advances in genetic knowledge that were made since he presented the tiny genome size of some *Genlisea* for the first time at the 2010 conference. Genetics is getting far more advanced and *Genlisea* is at the point of it all.

Ulrike Bauer presented her research on the role of rain in the capture of prey by *Nepenthes*. Some of you will have seen something about this on Facebook, but to get the complete presentation is a different level. One thing that stuck in my mind was the film that showed how the shape of the lid helps with the capture, as a regular lid would vibrate and wobble and just knock the ants all over the place. The specially adapted lid reacted totally different and made a clear and straight up and down motion resulting in the ants being tipped in the pitcher with some nice accuracy.

Laura Skates was one of the students and she took the opportunity offered for a poster presentation. In a nice and compact overview, she went into part of her research on the *Byblis* family of her native Australia. I like the idea of having poster sessions, but the CPS had done it a bit different than usual. One lecture spot was reserved to look at the poster presentations. Usually the posters are set up and people walk by them at various times. This is what I actually like about the fact that every two years there is a different host. Everyone has slightly different ideas on how to do things and are thus making others think. Some ideas are keepers, others not. Which one it is depends on the person observing it and the team that plans the next conference.

Simon Poppinga had a nice presentation on *Utricularia*. Lots of interesting information on trap structure and how the effectiveness of the traps is related to the shape and construction of the trap. Amongst the things he told us was something I never realized. The speed with which the prey is sucked in to the trap is such that the prey is actually smashed into the trap wall and is actually killed by that crash.

Greg Bourke was a bit of a tease. He gave some interesting food for thought on the variety of plants we put in the *Drosera binata* cluster, hinting of several interesting things that we will have to wait for the paper to come out to actually find out. But it is obvious that some splitting is about to occur so get your label writer ready.

Perhaps the oddest lecture topic was presented by Evin Magner. Doug Darnowski couldn't make it, so this student was sent to present the idea that some seaweed might actually be carnivorous. To put a pin in everyone's balloon of imagination, no proof was offered. The basis of this idea is that seaweed occurs in places that on paper don't have enough nutrients to support them and that in the seaweed group there are plants capable of making every structure, possibly including those that



Figure 2: Sir David Attenborough (right) thanking the audience for the painting that was just presented to him by CPS co-host Tim Bailey (left) and ICPS President Marcel van den Broek (middle).

could be used to capture prey. Evin made a valiant effort to defend the idea, but while his talk was clear and decently put together, the idea he was sent to present was, in my opinion, weak. However, you can judge for yourself, because Doug's paper is on page 140 of this issue.

The absolute highlight was the presentation of a painting of *Nepenthes attenboroughii* to Sir David Attenborough on behalf of the CP community. After a short talk by Rob Cantley, there was a really nice tribute by Charles Clarke. This was followed by remarks by Stewart McPherson, one of many people to be inspired by Sir David's work. After that came the presentation of the painting by Tim Bailey and myself (Fig. 2). Did I mention it was quite hot in the room? Good, they probably thought my sweat was from the temperature!

What actually helped was that I had met Sir David during the break before the presentation. He is really nice and manages to make you feel more relaxed than logically would be the case. I put this down to two things. First of all, I grew up with his documentaries (who didn't?) and that sort of gives you the feeling you know him. Secondly, he is so incredibly modest in his attitude. "So I have been on TV since the 1950's and set today's standard for a nature documentary. I was just doing my job which I happen to love" would be how I would sum this up.

By the way, there was another celebrity there. Bill Bailey (no relation to Tim), a famous UK comedian and presenter, was also in the audience to watch the presentations.

Having survived the presentation and unveiled the wonderful painting by Lucy Smith, the audience got a really nice speech as Sir David was kind enough to say a few words. In his well-known voice, he gave a thanks and told us about his connection to carnivorous plants from his days as a boy exploring the British countryside till the present day. He spoke with great humor and soon the whole room was captured by his remarks and quotes. The question about why the nectar on the lid of a *Nepenthes*, that had small rodents licking the nectar in order to collect their droppings, didn't contain a laxative sure got everybody laughing.

In conclusion, I can say it was once again a great conference and I'm already looking forward to the next one in 2018. By regular rotation the next conference should be in The Americas. So, if you are interested, the call for proposals will be made soon.