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NEWS REPORT

Six young research investigators were honored at an international conference in Russia

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The conference in honor of Jim Barber

An international conference ''Photosynthesis in the Post-Genomic Era: Structure and Function of Photosystems was held in Pushchino, Moscow Region, Russia, August 20–26, 2006.'' This meeting was held in honor of James (Jim) Barber, who celebrated his 65th birthday last year, his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS), and his outstanding contributions to photosynthesis research over many years [see e.g., his personal perspective (Barber 2005)]. It covered many aspects of his research with a particular emphasis on his recent contributions to the resolution of the structure of Photosystem II and the water splitting complex. It also acknowledged his recent efforts in publicizing the current global crisis due to increasing CO_2 levels in the atmosphere and the importance of studies on artificial photosynthesis and model systems which mimic the photosynthetic process.

This meeting was a great success due to the incredible efforts of its coordinator, Suleyman Allakhverdiev, along with Vladimir Shuvalov and Vyacheslav Klimov, the chairman and co-chairman of the meeting, respectively. The fact that the conference (with more than 230 participants) was held in Russia was a fitting acknowledgement of Jim's strong links with the Russian photosynthesis research community. It was a truly international meeting, represented by participants from about 30 countries (Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States of America).

Young investigators

There was a strong showing of young scientists and Ph.D. students from many of the countries listed above; this was recognized by the award of special certificates signed by Jim Barber to six presenters of posters who were judged to be the best shown during the meeting. A committee of poster session chairpersons made suggestions and one of us (AT) coordinated a discussion where they made their difficult choice. Those chosen were then given a chance (at a very short notice!) to give a brief presentation during the final session of the meeting. After their very professional talks, they were then presented with the signed certificates by Jim Barber (designed by Jon Nield), and a traditionally decorated Russian plate. One of us (Govindjee) also promised a gift of a book, of his choice, to be mailed later to the winners.

The poster presentation winners were as follows:

Katrin Beckmann graduated in 2004, with a Diploma in Biology, from the Ruhr University in Bochum,

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Germany. She is currently a Ph.D. student, in the research group of Johannes Messinger, at the Max-Planck-Institute for Bioinorganic Chemistry, Mülheim (Ruhr), Germany. She is doing research on photosynthetic oxygen evolution.

Marja Hakala received her M.Sc. degree in Plant Physiology in 2001 from the University of Turku, Finland. She continues her post-graduate studies at the same university, under the guidance of Esa Tyystjärvi, in the Plant Physiology and Molecular Biology section. She is working on a new, manganese-mediated mechanism of Photosystem II photoinhibition.

Matt Johnson graduated with a B.Sc. in 2003 in Biochemistry from the University of Sheffield, UK. He is currently working on his Ph.D. thesis, in the research group of Peter Horton, at the Robert Hill Institute for Photosynthesis Research, University of Sheffield. He is doing research on plants which over-express β-carotene hydroxylase.

Natalia Krupenina graduated with an M.Sc. in 2005 in Biophysics from Moscow State University, Russia. Her thesis was on ''The effect of electrical excitation on pH banding and photosynthetic activity in *Chara* coralline cells.'' At the moment, she is working on her Ph.D. in Biophysics, in the research group of Alexander Bulychev, at Moscow State University. She is working on photosynthesis and cell membranes.

Chavdar Slavov graduated with a B.Sc. in Molecular Biology and an M.Sc. in Biophysics in 2005 from Sofia University, Bulgaria. He is currently working on his Ph.D. thesis, in the research group of Alfred Holzwarth, at the Max-Planck-Institute for Bioinorganic Chemistry, Mülheim (Ruhr), Germany. He is doing research on excitation energy and electron transfer processes in Photosystem I.

Fig. 1 (Left to Right): Katrin Beckman, Chavdar Slavov, Irina Tolstygina, and Matt Johnson

Irina Tolstygina obtained her M.Sc. in 2003, in Microbiology from Rostov State University, Russia. She is currently a Ph.D. student, in the research group of Anatoly Tsygankov, at the Institute of Basic Biological Problems, Russian Academy of Sciences, Pushchino, Russia. She is doing research on hydrogen photoproduction by green algae.

For abstracts presented by the above winners, see the Book of Programme and Abstracts, published by the Russian Academy of Sciences (2006). Figure 1 shows a photograph of four of the winners, and Fig. 2 shows the other two with one of us (Govindjee) and Eva-Mari Aro (President of the International Society of Photosynthesis Research; see Aro et al. 2006).

We end this report with a photograph of Suleyman Allakhverdiev, coordinator of the Conference (Fig. 3) and of Jim Barber with one of us (AT), his associate in research since 1972 (Fig. 4).

Fig. 2 (Left to Right): Natalia Krupenina, Eva-Mari Aro, Govindjee, and Marja Hakala

Fig. 3 A 2006 photograph of Suleyman Allakhverdiev, coordinator of the Conference

Fig. 4 A 2006 photograph of Jim Barber and Alison Telfer

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Russian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Basic Biological Problems (2006) International Meeting ''Photosynthesis in the Post-Genomic Era: Structure and Function of Photosystems'', 20–26 August, 2006, Programme and Abstracts, NIA-Priroda, Moscow, 309 pp [K. Beckman, p. 188; M. Hakala, p. 244; M. Johnson, p. 246; N. Krupenina, p. 254; C. Slavov, p. 181; I. Tolstygina, p. 220]

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