

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/
Conference Title:**

2016 CSHL meeting on “Evolutionary Biology of *Caenorhabditis* and Other Nematodes”

Travel Dates:

30/03/2016 – 04/04/2016

Location:

Cold Spring Harbor, New York, USA

Group member(s):

Dominik R. Laetsch (Mark Blaxter Group)

Aims:

Platform presentation on (at the time unpublished) results of my PhD project

Exchange of ideas with other researchers

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):

The James Rennie Bequest Travel Award enabled me to attend the 2016 Cold Spring Harbour Meeting “Evolutionary Biology of *Caenorhabditis* and Other Nematodes” which is focussed on research on the evolutionary biology of nematodes (i.e. “roundworms”). Nematodes are the most abundant animal phylum on Earth and show a vast range of life-styles, including animal and plant-parasitic species, as well as the model organism *C. elegans*.

The meeting was attended by 100 researchers and consisted of one session which was divided into 10 topics. In total, 46 platform talks were given and 16 scientific posters were presented. The impact of new DNA/RNA sequencing technologies on nematode research was noticeable throughout the conference, as 14 talks were based on genomic data of previously un-sequenced species. Among the most interesting contributions, were “The mid-developmental transition and the evolution of animal body plans” by Itay Yanai and “Characterizing genome shrinkage in hermaphroditic *Caenorhabditis* with third-generation genome sequences having near-chromosomal contiguity” by Erich Schwarz.

I presented (at the time unpublished) results from my PhD project under the title “The genome of the yellow potato cyst nematode *Globodera rostochiensis*” as a platform talk. The presentation was well received as several researchers participated actively in the discussion period that followed. Furthermore, I was listed as a co-author in the presentation “Genomics of Nematoda” given by my supervisor, Mark Blaxter, and during the discussion periods after each presentation I volunteered to assist the CSHL audio visual department by carrying the microphone to those researchers who wanted to ask questions.

The small size of the meeting and the excellently organized itinerary made interacting with other researchers straightforward. As an example, the first day of the meeting, my supervisor introduced me to David Bird, whom I only knew from the literature. During the meeting he and I spent many hours discussing his and my research and at the end of the meeting he agreed to act as external examiner for my PhD viva.

The meeting was held at the Cold Spring Harbour Laboratory, a private, non-profit institution that played an essential role in the history of molecular genetics and biology and has been home to 8 Nobel Prize winners. Attendees of the meeting were lodged on site in charming bungalows in close proximity to the auditorium. Catering was included in the registration and

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was of exceptional quality and abundance, culminating in the final banquet at which the CSHL lobsters were served. During the banquet, I had the privilege to be seated at the same table as CSHL president Bruce Stillman and Barbara Meyer (famous for her work on lambda phage, sex determination and dosage compensation). Listening to their stories about scientific research and the securing of funding was extremely entertaining and educational.

I have attended several international meeting in the past but this conference has been exceptional in all aspects. I am grateful to the James Rennie Bequest Committee for giving me the travel award.