2016 ASPS President’s Report

ASPS promotes the discipline of Plant Science and provides professional contact and networking for plant scientists and University-level educators in Australia. <http://www.asps.org.au/> Key objectives of the Society are to:

• Facilitate the dissemination of new research.

• Provide a forum for sharing of knowledge so that the membership can build both the depth and breadth of knowledge of plant functions.

• Provide mutual support and collective mentorship.

• Recognise and reward excellence in plant science research and teaching.

• Nurture the next generation of plant scientists.

I feel once again that this year I was overrun by demands (different ones to last year) which have limited my time devoted to the society. I am sure that I am not alone in feeling that academics continually face growing demands on their time as more tasks are devolved upon them. We also face more frequent interruptions and expectations to be contactable at all times. I resorted to taking a month of long service leave so that I could work uninterrupted on a review and it was amazing how pleasurable it was to be able to ignore the incessant inflow of ‘urgent’ requests and devote myself to reading and interpreting the literature.

ASPS is a lean operation with no secretariat. I thank the outgoing Secretary (Martha Ludwig) and Treasurer (Brent Kaiser) for their contributions. We continue to have superb support from a tireless **Janet Wheeler** who keeps abreast of our website and database. Thank you also to: (i) Barry Pogson, our representative on the Global Plant Council <http://globalplantcouncil.org/> , (ii) Uli Mathesius our representative on Science Technology Australia <http://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au/> ; (iii) Ros Gleadow and Christine Beveridge who represented ASPS on the AAS National Committees for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Cellular and Developmental Biology, respectively. (For information on the AAS National Committees <https://www.science.org.au/supporting-science/national-committees-science> ).

ComBio 2016

ASPS works in partnership with other relevant Australian (and New Zealand) Societies to jointly organise the national conference ComBio. In 2016, these societies were: Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, ASPS and Australia and New Zealand Society for Cell and Developmental Biology. We are grateful for the efforts of **Rebecca Ford** (Griffith University) and **Bernie Carrol** (University of Queensland) who served as the ASPS Representatives on the ComBio 2016 Organising Committee here in Brisbane.

ASPS Awards in 2016

* **Sam** **Periyannan** (CSIRO Agriculture) on winning the **Peter Goldacre Award** for his research on rust disease resistance genes in wheat. Through his PhD research at CSIRO Agriculture and University of Sydney, Sam cloned Sr33, which is one of the first stem rust resistance genes isolated from wheat. Later, as a Postdoctoral Fellow at CSIRO, he developed (in collaboration with JIC, UK) a rapid resistance gene isolation technology called “MutRenSeq” which is developed to by-pass positional cloning, a long and tedious process especially in the partially sequenced and complex wheat genome. Currently, using the MutRenSeq platform, his research is focused on isolation of additional rust resistances aimed towards the development of gene cassettes for durable rust resistance. Through Adjunct positions at University of Sydney and Queensland, Sam is also involved in training PhD students who will become the next generation of scientists.

The Goldacre award recognises research achievement in the past 3 years by an early-career member of the Society (within 10 years of PhD). The Award honours the memory and attainments of Peter Goldacre, a young scientist and foundation member of this Society who was held in great respect by his peers, but passed away from cancer at the early age of 34 (in 1960). The award of a medal plus $2,000 is sponsored by Functional Plant Biology.

* **Prof RT Furbank** (Australian National University) who delivered the 2016 **RN Robertson Lecture** ‘Walking in the C4 pathway’. This year marks 50 years since Hal Hatch and Roger Slack published their paper describing the C4 biochemical pathway associated with work done at the Colonial Sugar Refining lab here in Brisbane. Hatch MD, Slack CR. 1966. Photosynthesis by sugar-cane leaves: a new carboxylation reaction and the pathway of sugar formation. Biochem. J. 101:103–11. Unfortunately this lecture was not recorded and I am hoping that Bob will deliver it again so that we can capture the audio as the personal history is something that we should archive.
* **Diep Ganguly** (Australian National University) for winning the **ASPS-FPB Best Paper Award for an Early-Career Scientist** published in Functional Plant Biology in 2015: Ganguly D, Crisp P, Harter K, Pogson BJ & Albrecht-Borth V. Genetic suppression of plant development and chloroplast biogenesis via the Snowy Cotyledon 3 and Phytochrome B pathways. Functional Plant Biology 42, 676-686. The prize includes a personal one-year print+online subscription to FPB, a $250 book voucher from CSIRO PUBLISHING, and a certificate.
* **Millicent Smith** (The University of Sydney) was awarded the **RN Robertson Travelling Fellowship** to visit the Institute of Bio- and Geosciences (IBG-2) at Forschungszentrum Jülich (FZJ) to use a portable NMR sensor, developed by Dr. Carel Windt. Reports from previous winners are available at: http://www.asps.org.au/awards/robertson-fellowship

Unfortunately, again there was no ASPS Teaching Award in 2016. The award recognises excellence, innovation and/or contributions to teaching of plant science at University level. Members are encouraged to consider nominations for this important award.

**Phytogen** <http://www.asps.org.au/publications/phtyogen/phytogen-blog>

Phytogen is now a blog and web resource where news and information can be shared. For content submissions contact the Editor; Dr Chris Cazzonelli [c.cazzonelli@uws.edu.au](mailto:c.cazzonelli@uws.edu.au) or Co Editor; Conjoint Professor Tina Offler [tina.offler@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:tina.offler@newcastle.edu.au)

**Plants in Action** 2 <http://www.asps.org.au/plants-in-action-2nd-edition-pdf-files>

We are especially grateful to Rana Munns who has been the driving force behind this important project, with support from Susanne Schmidt and UQ for hosting it.

**Functional Plant Biology**

ASPS has a special relationship with FPB. We thank FPB/CSIRO Publishing for continuing to sponsor the Goldacre Award and ASPS-FPB Early Career Scientist Best Paper Award. We thank ASPS members for your contributions to the peer review process for FPB.

**Science Meets Parliament**

Hannah Osborne and Yong Ling Ruan attended this event organised by Science & Technology Australia. The sixteenth Science meets Parliament was a great opportunity for scientists to inform and excite politicians about science and at the same time learn about politics and the policy, media and parliamentary processes. The event was held over two days the first day is to prepare us for meeting the politician, the second day is actually meeting them. Professor Brian Schmidt was up first offering many pearls of wisdom from his experiences dealing with politicians. Top tips included “Don’t get defensive”, “Don’t whinge or complain about lack of funding” and remember they’re human! We then heard from journalists Paul Bongiorno and Alison Carabine about the role of media in science. The take home message from Science meets Parliament 2016 was Professor Graham Durant’s comment “science isn’t finished until it’s communicated” which is something we should all remember and include as an important part of our research.

If you are interested in participating in this event or Science meets business, please let the ASPS secretary know.

**Mentoring**

I would like to encourage everyone to consider ways in which they can mentor others. As an example, I was asked if the society could help junior academics in the art of reviewing. Many journals allow reviewers to co-opt others to help and we should all make an effort to take this opportunity to share our experience with younger inexperienced colleagues.

**ARC grant reviewing**

Many of us depend on financial support from the ARC to enable our research. We also review proposals. It is easy to be more critical of research close to one’s own area of expertise, but we should remember that the consequence may be that funds simply flow to other fields of research. I would urge everyone to strive to be positive in their criticism and support your fellow plant scientists where possible.

**Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE)**

It is well known that a significant gender bias exists in Academia with a progressively smaller fraction of females in more senior academic positions. SAGE has been established to address this issue and ASPS should play an active part. A sub-committee will be established to coordinate our efforts.

This year completes my term as President and I now have served in all roles of the executive (Secretary, Treasurer, Public Officer). Academia continues to change and the challenge ASPS faces is how to best represent plant science and foster the next generation. I strongly believe that our society provides a focal point for this and I urge you all to be active members of ASPS and encourage people to join.

John Evans

President, Australian Society of Plant Scientists

September 2016