

2014 FASEB conference “Machines on Genes” Snowmass, Colorado June 22-27 2014

The 2014 FASEB conference “Machines on Genes” took place June 22-27 at the Base Village Conference Center in Snowmass, Colorado. The meeting, co-organized by Brandt Eichman (Vanderbilt University), Jeffrey Kieft (University of Colorado Denver), and Thomas Carrol (Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich, Germany), attracted an international group of 94 participants from Australia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, England, Scotland, and the United States.

The conference focused on the structural and molecular mechanisms that underlie diverse molecular transactions involving nucleic acids, including RNA and DNA repair, translation, transcription, catalysis, epigenetic control, replication, chromatin structure, CRISPR, and other exciting topics. Speakers presented research across nine sessions throughout the week. There were 36 invited speakers and an additional 13 speakers from contributed abstracts, 48 poster presenters, 7 poster awards, and 14 travel awards to students and postdoctoral fellows. Funds from the RNA Society provided fellowships for two junior scientists, **Joan Marcano-Velázquez** (University of Colorado, Batey lab) and **Erik Holmstrom** (University of Colorado, Nesbitt lab), who presented their work on riboswitches. Many leaders and members of the RNA Society were in attendance.

Highlights from the meeting included an exciting keynote address from Carlos Bustamante, and a very successful career panel and “Meet the Expert” session, which afforded students and post-docs the chance to query seasoned investigators for career advice and experiences. In addition, there was ample chance for building new collaborations during a group whitewater rafting trip and while discussing science at the poster sessions while savoring beer provided by Coda brewery from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical campus.

Keep your eyes peeled for the Machines on Genes meeting to be held in UK/Europe in 2016!

10th annual RiboWest Conference 2014, Alberta, Canada June 28- 21st 2014

This year the RiboWest Conference in western Canada celebrated its 10th anniversary showcasing the quality and quantity of RNA research in this region and beyond. About 100 undergraduate and graduate students, postdocs and PIs attended the meeting that was organized for the fourth time by the Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute (ARRTI) at the University of Lethbridge. And once again all participants praised the high quality of the scientific sessions clearly proving that impressive RNA research takes place in this part of North America. As one participant said: “I hoped to make some new connections and get some feedback on my work. Both of these goals were achieved!” Clear highlights of this year’s event were the lectures by Joan Steitz, Brenda Bass and François Bachand who inspired everybody. To celebrate

RiboWest’s anniversary, all participants boarded a bus and spent one day at the beautiful Waterton National Park in the Rocky Mountains. There, we shared more science in the “Thirsty Bear Saloon” (who has had an RNA session in a Saloon before?) and enjoyed a free and sunny afternoon despite all lot of rain and flooding around us. In addition, we looked beyond actual RNA research with two inspiring lectures by Bonnie Schmidt (“Bringing life to science: why it matters”) and by Alexander Zehnder (“Dare, Despite Prevailing Opinions”). The RiboWest Conference 2014 concluded with a conference dinner and award presentations as the RNA Society had generously supported fellowships and awards for students attending this



event (see below). Photo above : Participants of the 10th Annual RiboWest Conference 2014 during the daytrip to Waterton National Park.

A special “RiboWest Outstanding Service Award” was given to Stephen Rader (second from left) to recognize his vision and leadership when founding the RiboWest Conference 10 years ago.

(Ute Kothe, and to right of Rader, Hans-Joachim Wieden and Tony Russell, Alberta RNA Research and Training Institute (ARRTI), University of Lethbridge)



Fellowship Winners (CAD 250 each):

Zev Ripstein, undergraduate student, University of Manitoba, Dr. Sean McKenna’s lab

Azra Lari, M.Sc. student, University of Alberta, Dr. Ben Monpetit’s lab

Anthony Khong, Ph.D. student, University of British Columbia, Dr. Eric Jan’s lab

Shanker Shyam Sundhar Panchapakesan, Ph.D. student, Simon Fraser University, Dr. Peter Unrau’s lab

Presentation Awards:

Azra Lari, M.Sc. student, University of Alberta, Dr. Ben Monpetit’s lab (CAD 150)

Laura Keffer-Wilkes, Ph.D. student, University of Lethbridge, Dr. Ute Kothe’s lab (CAD 150)

Aaron Robart, Postdoctoral Fellow, University of California San Diego, Dr. Navtej Toor’s lab (Book Award)

Poster Awards selected by Students

Craig Kerr, University of British Columbia, Dr. Eric Jan’s lab (CAD 150)

David McWatters, University of Lethbridge, Dr. Tony Russell’s lab (CAD 150)

Lucy Swift, University of Lethbridge, Dr. Roy Golsteyn’s lab (CAD 150)

Michael Gozdzik, University of Alberta, Dr. Richard Fahlman’s lab (Book Award)

Ian Andrews, University of Lethbridge, Dr. Hans-Joachim Wieden’s lab (Book Award)

Reba Murphy, University of Lethbridge, Dr. Marc Roussel’s lab (Book Award)

Poster Awards selected by Principal Investigators

Craig Kerr, University of British Columbia, Dr. Eric Jan’s lab (CAD 150)

Kirsten Reimer, University of British Columbia, Dr. Stephen Rader’s lab (CAD 150)

Priya Verma, University of British Columbia, Dr. Stephen Rader’s lab (CAD 150)

Elijah Dueck, University of Lethbridge, Dr. Ute Kothe’s lab (Book Award)

Reba Murphy, University of Lethbridge, Dr. Marc Roussel’s lab (Book Award)

Matthew Lau, National heart, Lung and Blood Institute, NIH, Dr. Adrian Ferré-D’Amaré’s lab (Book Award)

DNA Habitats and its RNA Inhabitants, Salzburg, Austria

July 3-5, 2014

This meeting assembled experts on RNA Biology, Virology and Evolution to discuss a fundamental new understanding of genetic novelty, code-generating, genome-formatting factors, multi-use nature for RNA agents and behavioral motifs of RNA-consortia, that act as natural genetic content operators in all fine-tuned steps and substeps of key cellular processes such as gene expression, transcription, translation, DNA recombination and repair, epigenetic imprinting (memory, learning), as well as various forms of innate and adaptive immunity. In this perspective DNA remains as a rather limited ecosphere habitat for an abundance of competing and cooperating RNA inhabitants that actively generate and constitute nucleic acid content.

The meeting “DNA Habitats and its RNA inhabitants” was organized by philosopher of language and biology Guenther Witzany as an update of the 2008 conference on Natural Genetic

