

Helen Brewer
Rothamsted Research Wheat Pathogenomics Group

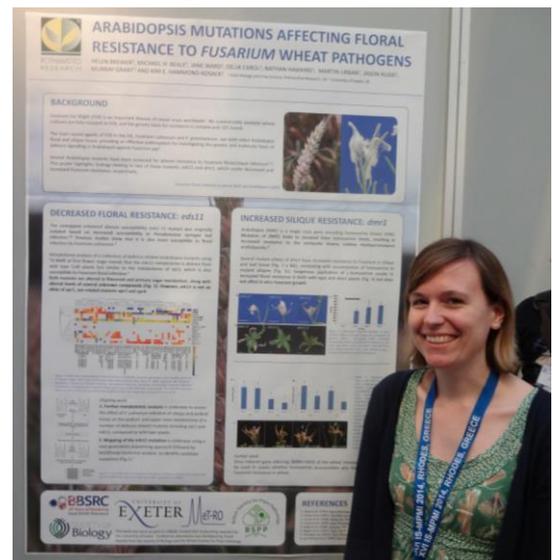
The XVI International Congress on Molecular Plant-Microbe interactions took place from 6th-10th July 2014 on the beautiful island of Rhodes, Greece. I am very grateful to both the British Society for Plant Pathology (BSPP) and the Society of Biology for awarding me the funding needed to attend. This was a large, global meeting of researchers with approximately 1200 delegates attending from 54 countries. There was therefore no shortage of excellent research being showcased with a selection of 8 plenary sessions and 32 concurrent sessions to choose from, each comprising 4-6 talks. In addition to this there were 755 posters displayed over the space of three evenings.

While primarily focusing on the molecular aspects of plant-microbe interactions, the research presented at the conference did cover a broad range of subjects, from 'omics and breakthrough technologies for basic research through to novel diagnostics and biocontrol strategies for the field. Effectors and Resistance (R) genes (which form the basis of many plant-pathogen interactions and determine infection outcomes at a molecular level) were naturally high on the list of hot topics, not least because the Congress was celebrating the 30th anniversary of the cloning of the first avirulence effector and the 20th anniversary of the identification of the first R genes.

While the majority of the research presented focussed on interactions between microbes and dicotyledonous plants such as Arabidopsis and tomato, a number of interesting recent advances in research into cereal disease and resistance were also presented which are of relevance to my own work. One of these was the transformation of the wheat resistance gene LR34 into barley and rice, conferring resistance to barley mildew and rice blast, respectively, as presented by members of Beat Keller's group from the University of Zurich. Another was the identification of a *Fusarium graminearum* isolate from North America producing a new type of trichothecene mycotoxin, presented by G. Wiesenberger and colleagues from Austria and the USA.

There were also interesting insights presented on both the industry and the policy front. Karin Posthuma from breeding company Enza Zaden shared translational research on the silencing of susceptibility genes *PMR4* and *MLO* to protect against downy and powdery mildews in vegetable crops. Meanwhile Mario Lorito (University of Naples) warned us of the impact of the impending EU directive on legislation of plant protection products, and the need to have new disease and pest control strategies in the pipeline.

My favourite presentation however came from the field of plant-nematode interactions; Andrew Bent from the University of Wisconsin showed that the effectiveness of soybean nematode resistance locus RHG1 is determined by copy number, specifically multiple repetitions of three genes, and that this can be transferred to susceptible lines.



I can only imagine the organisation that must be required for a conference of this magnitude, and was therefore very impressed by how smoothly everything was run and found the meeting (and the food!) thoroughly interesting and enjoyable. My only criticism is that the talks in the concurrent sessions often overran substantially, and that timekeeping was not well enforced by the session Chairs. This negatively affected the smooth running of the conference by preventing movement between sessions and detracting time from poster sessions. However this was my first international meeting and I understand that this is something I may have to get used to! I also really enjoyed manning the BSPP stand and the opportunity this provided to network and to tell people about the society, and to meet the other BSPP travel awardees.

Following the Congress I spent a very relaxing few days exploring the island, which including visiting the stunning Valley of the Butterflies and the cat sanctuary at Kallithea springs. I highly recommend it as a holiday destination. I would also like to highlight that the next International Congress on Molecular Plant Microbe Interactions takes place in Oregon in July 2016, and is an excellent conference choice for early career plant pathology researchers wishing to engage with the international community.