

CAWS Early Career Weed Scientist Travel Award 2014

Christina Birnbaum – Travel Report

As the recipient of the 2014 CAWS Early Career Weed Scientist Travel Award, I attended the 4th International Symposium on Environmental Weeds and Invasive Plants which was held in Montpellier, France, from May 19-23, 2014. On the second day of the conference, I presented a talk on my PhD research that I undertook under the supervision of Professor Michelle Leishman at the Plant Ecology and Restoration Laboratory while based at Macquarie University, New South Wales. The title of my talk was *Do soil microbes matter in plant invasions? A case study from Australia on five acacias and their associated soil microbial communities across non-native and native range populations*. The talk presented an overview of my PhD, which looked at the role of soil biota, focussing predominantly on nitrogen fixing bacterial and soil fungal communities, associated with weedy acacias in Australia across their non-native and native ranges.

The conference was organized by representatives from a number of French and foreign research agencies such as INRA, Cirad, Anses, USDA and Csiro and attended by 170 participants from 33 countries (representing all continents). Over four days there were seven sessions, 89 posters and one excursion day. The sessions covered topics such as *Invasive plants in Mediterranean regions*, *Ecological impacts of invasive plants*, *Invasive plants in aquatic and riparian systems*, *Biology, ecology, evolution and impacts of invasive plants*, *Invasive plant management: biological and integrated control*, a whole day session on highly problematic ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*), *Human perception of biological invasions* and *New tools for weed risk assessment*. The keynote speakers included some of the most distinguished researchers in the field such as Montserrat Vilà (Spain), Urs Schaffner (Switzerland), Joe Caffrey (Ireland), Sébastien Lavergne (France), Massimo Cristofaro (Italy), Dane Panetta (Australia) and Vernon Heywood (UK).

An optional tour presented participants with a great opportunity to leave the theory behind for a day and observe some weeds in action! I joined one of the two tours on offer named *Garrigues and vineyards* during which we visited Salagou Lake where we saw weeds such as *Opuntia rosea* (cactus) and *Lagarosiphon major* (aquatic weed), then we were taken on a botanical walk to learn about the local flora of garrigues (soft-leaved scrubland in the Mediterranean) and ended the day with a visit to a local vineyard.

As an early career researcher, attendance at this conference offered an invaluable opportunity to meet colleagues from all continents working on invasive species, especially acacias, and establish contact with leaders in the field. The opportunity to present and promote my work also enabled to communicate my research to the broader international community.

More information about the conference, including a pdf of the book of abstracts and a conference report, are available online for free (<http://invasive.weeds.montpellier.ewrs.org>).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank CAWS for their financial support, which made my attendance at this conference possible.