



The Newsletter of the International Association of Meiobenthologists

PSAMMONALIA

WORD FROM THE EDITOR

This is a special issue of *Psammonalia* highlighting the "18IMCO - 18th International Meiofauna Conference" and particularly the "Meioscool", which will be held online the week prior to the conference. This event is an opportunity for students and researchers to learn about meiofauna identification and microscopy.

The "Meioscool" is an important initiative for all kind of meiofauna research topics. A consistent knowledge on morphology, taxonomy and phylogeny of meiofauna is mandatory to answer scientific questions in meiofauna ecology.

Martin V. Sørensen (Natural History Museum of Denmark) sent us an important thought about "the strong bias towards ecological contributions, and to experience how questions about morphology and evolution apparently played a more secondary role". I share with you this

important note to motivate our joint reflection on the subject during the next 18th IMCO and to invite you to submit your research to the topic "Systematics and Evolution".

The virtual format of the congress could be a great opportunity to gather more researchers from all over the world that otherwise could not have managed to be present at the conference.

We should use this occasion to learn, share and reflect on the latest advances and the future of meiofauna research.

Helena Adão,
Chairperson of the IAM



CALL FOR ABSTRACTS EXTENDED TO JULY 14TH!

UPDATE ON 18IMCO AND MEIOSCOOL

Dear colleagues,

I wanted to take this opportunity to provide an update on the upcoming meiofauna conference in December as well as Meioscool.

Hopefully you are all aware that 18IMCO will take place late this year, and that it will be an online event ([18IMCO2022 \(eventsair.com\)](https://www.eventsair.com/18IMCO2022)). The call for abstracts has been extended to 14 July so it is not too late to send us your contributions. We welcome presentations and posters on any topic related to meiofauna, from systematics and taxonomy to ecology, biogeography, human impact and everything in between. Case studies, experimental studies, opinion pieces, meta-analyses are all valuable.

We have some really great keynote speakers lined up for 18IMCO, representing a range of research areas. You may have noticed that one of them, Dr Lisa Levin, is not strictly speaking a meiobenthologist (although she has been involved in some meiofauna research over the years). The local organising committee thought it would be interesting to have an outside perspective to help place meiofauna in a wider context, and hopefully challenge us to think differently about our science.

While some of you may be disappointed about having to meet virtually, an online event has at least the advantage of being accessible to all. It has been over three years since 17IMCO, and many of us have a lot of new results to share and 18IMCO will help provide an outlet for meiobenthologists from around the globe.

Finally I'd like to mention Meioscool, which will be held online the week prior to 18IMCO. This event, held with support from the BLUE REVOLUTION project ([BLUE REVOLUTION project \(ifremer.fr\)](https://www.ifremer.fr/blue-revolution)), continues from the first two Meioscool events which were held in Brest. Meioscool provides an opportunity for students and researchers to learn about meiofauna identification and microscopy techniques

directly from international experts. This Meioscool will be free to attend, so make sure you keep an eye on the registration call, which will come later in July. In the meantime, you can have a look at the website for more details: [18IMCO2022 \(eventsair.com\)](https://www.eventsair.com/18IMCO2022)

There will be a special issue in PeerJ for all who attend 18IMCO or Meioscool. See here for more information: [Conference Collection and PeerJ Awards at 18IMCO/Meioscool - PeerJ Blog](https://www.peerj.com/conference-collection-and-peerj-awards-at-18imco-meioscool)

If you have any questions about 18IMCO or Meioscool, please feel free to contact me directly via email (daniel.leduc@niwa.co.nz)

Looking forward to see many of you later this year!

Daniel Leduc

(on behalf of the local organising committee)



Meiofauna International Workshop
Wellington, 28 November 2022 – 2 December 2022



CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

The International Association of Meiofauna is doing good. We have more members than ever, and we easily gather more than a hundred participants for the conferences. Well, it was a bummer that 18thIMCO now turned into an online conference, but it's probably the last kick from the Covid pandemic we're experiencing. But all in all, things are good and we should not worry too much. Or should we?

One of the last days at the conference in Evora, I remember Olav was giving this talk about the Meiofauna Society through time. Amazingly he had managed to gather group photos from basically all meiofauna conferences. It was fun to see the photos from the first conferences. There were definitely fewer participants back then, but it was so impressive to observe the diversity of researchers. Among these relatively small groups of researchers, we had very skilled ecologists, but also some of the best capacities in invertebrate morphology, taxonomists covering a broad range of taxa, pioneers in modern phylogeny, and even participants who had contributed the discovery of new animal phyla. What a crowd, what a diversity!

When I was still a fairly young and inexperienced student, I visited one of these masters who appeared on the early photos. For three weeks, I got loaded with knowledge and information about meiofaunal worms. I was completely overwhelmed. When it finally was time to wrap up and go back home, I told him: "It's such a pity I have to go now, but fortunately I'll see you soon at the next Meiofauna Conference". To my big surprise he answered "no, don't expect to see me there. The Meiofauna Conferences are not really relevant for me any

longer". I was puzzled. How could the Meiofauna Conferences not be relevant for one of the greatest and most unique meiofauna researchers through time?

Some months later I started understanding. I went to my first meiofauna conference, and yes, I met many nice colleagues there, but I was also a bit surprised to observe the strong bias towards ecological contributions, and to experience how questions about morphology and evolution apparently played a more secondary role. Another thing I had been looking forward to was talking with and learning from colleagues working with other meiofaunal animal groups, but except for nematode and copepod specialists, there were so few of these experts representing "the others". Certain phyla were not even represented at the conference, even though I knew that active taxonomic and systematic research was going on within these groups.

Over the years, I've unfortunately only experienced how this bias towards ecology grew bigger, while the number of taxonomists and morphologists drops at each conference. At the last meiofauna conference think we could count the number of PI's not working with ecology on one hand. Why has the society changed so much? One could say that we've grown tremendously in abundance, while diversity has decreased proportionally. Is there an ecological term for this phenomenon?

I think the change I've experienced has happened over a longer period, which is also why I do not wish to point my finger at any particular conferences. But still, the last conference in Evora exemplifies very well why the non-ecologists sometimes feel a little excluded. In

CRISIS? WHAT CRISIS?

one of the early circulated messages about 17thIMCO the organizers announcement the conference under the tentative title "Meiofauna in a changing world: Meiofauna ecosystems processes and innovative methodological tools to translate complex interactions of marine and freshwater ecosystem". I read the title, and said to myself "oh dear, now they're really trying to scare the remaining non-ecologists away". I wrote a message to the organizers to make sure if non-ecologists were still welcome at the conference. Fortunately, they could assure that we definitely were welcome. I'm not sure that everyone got this message though, because the shortage of taxonomists, morphologists, phylogenists, etc., had never been more clear. I'm not saying that this tentative title made all the difference. I'm pretty sure that choosing a journal for conference proceedings that doesn't publish taxonomy and systematics also was a contributing factor, just as some taxonomic colleagues felt discouraged when they signed up with systematic talks that subsequently got turned into poster presentations by the organizers.

I'm not saying the Meiofauna Society actively tries to scare non-ecologists away. But I'm asking if the Society does enough to hold on to the few that are left, and more importantly, tries to win some of those back who already left the society. One could of course argue that taxonomists and morphologists, and researchers focusing on all the soft bodied groups, and the strange and rare phyla slowly are getting extinct. This could be the reason why we don't see them in conferences any longer. Well, fortunately I can reject this. I'm

currently participating in a meiofauna workshop in Leiden, Holland, and right now I'm sitting in a lab at Naturalis, surrounded by skilled meiofauna colleagues. They still exist, and they are alive and kicking. We have flatworm experts here, Acoelomorpha experts, gastrotrich, rotifer, halacarid, polychaete, tardigrade and nemertine experts. But when I ask them if they plan to appear at the Meiofauna Conferences again, I always get the same answer as I got when I was a young student "no plans about this. The meiofauna conferences are not really relevant for us any longer". I'm sorry to say, but after the last couple of conferences I've started to feel the same way myself.

But fortunately the International Association of Meiofauna is doing good, and whether there is a crisis or not probably depends on the eye that sees it. Those who left the Association don't seem to miss it that much, and I rarely hear complaints among those who still attend the conferences. So maybe there is no crisis? But isn't it a pity if Meioscool – one of the best initiatives within the Meiofauna Association – in the future needs to recruit it's lecturers outside the Association? Isn't it a more interesting and healthy society if we have a broad palette of research fields represented? And shouldn't we, from an ecological point of view, try to embrace and recreate diversity – not only out in the natural habitats, but also within our own Association?

Martin V. Sørensen

Natural History Museum of Denmark

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MEIOBENTHOLOGISTS

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OR RENEWAL

The International Association of Meiobenthologists is a non-profit scientific society representing meiobenthologists in all aquatic disciplines. The Association is dedicated to the dissemination of information by publishing a quarterly newsletter and sponsoring a triennial International Conference. The newsletter, Psammonalia, is published mid-month in OCTOBER and August. Membership is open to any person who actively is interested in the study of meiofauna. Annual membership dues are EU\$10 (US\$10) and payment for up to 3 years in advance is possible. New members will receive Psammonalia beginning with the January issue of the year after joining. Additional contributions to the **Bertil Swedmark Fund**, used to support student attendance at the triennial conferences, is encouraged.

Please check the appropriate boxes:

New member* Renewing member Change of address

Regular membership (EU\$10 or US\$10) Patron or Sustaining membership (EU\$50 or US\$50)

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Members:

Dues payable in Euros bank transfer Psammonalia IBAN BE21 0012 7505 5603- BIC GEBABEBB. Send application to: Dr. Ann Vanreusel, Marine Biology Research group, Krijgslaan 281 (S8), B-9000 Gent, BELGIUM. Ann.vanreusel@ugent.be

Research interests: _____

(*) New members are encouraged to introduce yourself to members in a short bio (ca. 10 lines).