Dear EBBS Member,

We hope you are all enjoying the summer! To make the next few months even better we have several conferences coming up: our section has joined up with the EFB Polymer Biotechnology Section to bring you the Designer Biology Symposium, hosted in Vienna from the 7th to the 9th of June at Schönbrunn Castle. Other EFB meetings coming up are the Plant Biotechnology: Green for Good IV - G4G in Olomouc (19th-22nd June), organised by the Environmental Biotechnology Section, and the 9th International Conference on Environmental Engineering and Management - ICEM09 in Bologna (6th-9th September).

In other recent news the global March for Science was held on the 22nd of April, with over 600 pro-science marches held on every continent (yes, all of them!). We have a few words about the day below.

The past few months have also seen the UK begin its departure from the EU. This will bring a great deal of uncertainty to our community, and the full effects on individuals, research groups and institutions won’t be known for some time. What is certain is the need for organisations such as the EFB to promote scientific cooperation across ever-shifting borders.

Sadly our Section is losing Beatrice Vetter, our Communications Officer. Beatrice has diligently fulfilled the role, looking after our social media and editing this newsletter, since the Section was founded, but is now moving into scientific writing. Good luck, Beatrice! We’re putting together a new team of communication officers and contributors to take on Beatrice’s duties; we’re especially looking for PhD students and post-docs to help curate our social media, write articles, and raise our Section’s profile. We’d also like to have our members’ input, so if you have any news, job vacancies or news articles you’d like in the newsletter then please e-mail or tweet us @EFB_EBBS! We look forward to hearing from you!

Matt Edmundson & Konstantinos Vavitsas, May 2017


March for Science

The Trump presidency in the USA has seen a worrying trend away from evidence-based policies and towards those based on ideologies; for example climate change “scepticism” seems to have recently led to the deletion of climate change data from the Environmental Protection Agency’s website. In response to these political attitudes the scientific community has begun its push-back. The 22nd of April saw scientists and supporters of science from across the globe take part in the March for Science in over 600 individual events to oppose these regressive shifts in attitude and to re-assert the value of evidence-based policy decisions.

From left: Mike Capeness plus placard, with Nick Pantidos, Fatai Bello, and Charlotte Lilley from the @lehorsfall lab attending the Edinburgh march “If you’re not part of the solution, you’re part of the precipitate.”
In Edinburgh over 2000 people turned out for the event1, which arrived outside the Scottish Parliament building to hear speeches, one of which was given by Anne Glover, formerly Chief Scientific Adviser to the President of the European Commission. Professor Glover spoke about how scientists should hold to account those who push “alternative facts”. Dozens of similar events took place across Europe, from Reykjavík to Kazan, and from Palermo to Tromsø. The effects of the protests on policy remain to be seen, but it would seem that while science itself should remain apolitical we as scientists must become more politically active, demonstrating to politicians and the public how much we believe in the importance of evidence-based decision making.

2) https://satellites.marchforscience.com/
3) http://www.scotsman.com/news/thousands-take-to-edinburgh-streets-on-march-for-science-1-4426905

Let us know
Did you take part in a march? Do you think actions such as this are important to the community? Tweet us @EFB_EBBS and let us know.
We’d also like to see pictures of your banners! Tweet us them and we’ll put them in the next newsletter.

Upcoming events

Designer Biology Symposium; 7th to 9th June
Schönbrunn Castle, Vienna

Biotechnology of Plant Products: Green for Good IV - G4G; 19th to 22nd June
Faculty of Science, Palacký University, Olomouc

9th International Conference on Environmental Engineering and Management; 6th to 9th September
Alma Mater Studiorum University, Bologna

13th Asian Congress on Biotechnology - ACB 2017; 23rd to 27th July
Khon Kaen, Thailand

EUUSynBioS Symposium 2017: Engineering Biology for a Better Future; 31st August to 1st September
National Centre for Biotechnology, Madrid, Spain

EUROBIOTECH 2017; 11th to 14th September
Kraków, Poland

PhD course: Industrial Biotechnology for lignocellulose based processes; 22nd to 27th October
Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden

Synthetic Biology UK 2017; 27th to 28th November
Manchester, UK
Dr. Barbara Di Ventura
University of Heidelberg (Germany)
http://ibios.dkfz.de/tbi/index.php/synthetic-biology

Can you tell us about your background?

I graduated in Computer Engineering at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”. I got into biology at the very end of my university studies, precisely during my master thesis, when I was applying computational methods to infer gene networks from high-throughput gene expression data. I got so fascinated by molecular biology that I decided to pursue a PhD in this topic. I came to Heidelberg back in the summer of 2002 and started working at EMBL, under the supervision of Luis Serrano, a pioneer of synthetic biology. Luis is the culprit why an engineer like me ended up doing experiments! I am currently still in Heidelberg, at the Centre for Quantitative Analysis of Molecular and Cellular Biosystems (BioQuant), but only for few months. Starting from September, I will be a Full Professor at the University of Freiburg.

What is your area of expertise?

Synthetic biology, molecular and cellular engineering, computational biology (but not bioinformatics really!).

What is your current research?

Synthetic biologists have the tendency to work on many different topics. My lab is no exception! However, I can say that the major focus of the lab is to understand the connection between protein dynamics and function within living cells. To this aim, we engineer proteins so that they can be controlled with light. This research field is called “optogenetics”.

Why did you join EFB/EBBS?

I have been very active in the international Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) competition. A few years ago I was introduced to Louise Horsfall during the judges’ dinner party. We had a nice discussion and I liked her immediately very much. So, when she contacted me a few months later asking me if I wanted to be part of EBBS, I said yes. I thought this would be a great opportunity to meet people with similar interests and to broaden my horizons.

Where do you see your contribution as a board member for EBBS?

I guess I can bring in my passion for science and synthetic biology in particular. I like to get involved in activities such as conferences or workshops. Moreover, I work with students, thus I can promote EBBS among the younger generations.

Where do you see EBBS in the future?

I already like the activities that are organized by the section. I think we should continue this way! However, we can for instance do more to promote women in bioengineering/bioprocessing. We are already going in that direction, by trying to create the proper “infrastructure” that facilitates the presence of women among invited speakers at scientific meetings.

Would you share an interesting fact about yourself?

I love music and sing in a rock band! We’ve had the pleasure to entertain the attendees of conferences now and then. That was really cool, to be a speaker and, at the same time, the singer at the party!

Introducing the communication team

Matt Edmundson,
Communications Officer
University of Edinburgh
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Twitter: @Dr_Eddy_1

I came to work at Edinburgh by way of an undergraduate degree in genetics from the University of Newcastle, a PhD in Biochemistry from Leeds University, and two post-docs at Cardiff University, one in non-canonical amino acid incorporation into proteins and one in mammalian cell motility. Over the years I’ve been to many conferences and meetings conferences organised by the EFB, including the past two congresses, so I’m glad to be putting something back into the EBB section. My social media experience mostly consists of tweeting complaints about seats on trains and sharing pictures of cats. However, I do regularly participate in science communication events such as science festivals, and our lab has collaborated with artists on a number of projects looking to interpret our research. I can therefore truthfully claim that my work has been exhibited in the prestigious Victoria and Albert Gallery in London!

Konstantinos Vavitsas,
Communications Assistant
University of Copenhagen
kva@plen.ku.dk
Twitter: @konvavitsas

After obtaining my degree in Biology from the University of Athens, I decided to move to the (very) north of Europe, and study Applied Biotechnology at Uppsala University. Scandinavia kept me, and I moved to Copenhagen to do my PhD in Biotechnology/Synthetic Biology under the supervision of Professor Poul Erik Jensen. I worked on the bioproduction of terpenoids in photosynthetic organisms, and I am now close to the finishing line. I started being involved with communications as I joined the steering committee of EUSynBioS, a synthetic biology association for students and postdocs. That led to more activities, such as handling social media for my research centre, writing blogs for PLOS synthbio, and now joining the communications team of EBBS.

I value the skills and knowledge gained from communicating and connecting with both researcher and a more broad audience, while it is nice for a change to see your texts published without going through many months of peer-review!
Do you want to get involved?

We welcome any and all contributions to the section. If you have an idea for a new meeting in an area of bioengineering or bioprocessing, or if you would like to assist in section activities, please contact the section co-chairs:

Louise Horsfall lousie.Horsfall@ed.ac.uk  
Tim Overton tw.overton@bham.ac.uk

Do you have an idea for an article for the newsletter? Have you been to a conference and would like to report on it? Is there a particular topic in bioengineering and bioprocessing that you’d like to write about? Is there a position coming up in your lab? Please contact

Matt Edmundson medmunds@exseed.ed.ac.uk

Registration is open and abstract submission has gone live for ECB 2018!

Last year’s congress was a great success, with a great many excellent talks and discussions in the Polish city of Krakow, and July 2018 will see us arrive in Geneva for another four days of cutting edge science. You can visit the conference website and read Professor Gerrit Borchard’s welcome message for ECB 2018 [here]. The website is now open for abstract submission, and you can register for attendance [here]. If you’re quick you can take advantage of the additional 10% discount on the early bird rates! (up until 31st May 2017). Standard early bird rates are available up to the 1st of April 2018.