

# **Australasian Mycological Society President's Report**

## **John Dearnaley**

### **September 2017**

My final year as AMS President has been a reasonably quiet one without a conference to organise. The main focus over the last 12 months has been sending out monthly newsletters, getting websites set up for the society's new subcommittees in fungal education and conservation and liaising with the Australian Society of Microbiology (ASM) regarding the combined ASM-AMS conference in July 2018. The following is an overview of the activities of the society since the AGM of September 2016.

#### **Finance and membership**

The society's financial health is solid with the only major expenditure in the past financial year allocation of the 2017 student research award. There are currently 91 financial members of the society which is a modest increase on the numbers from 2016 (88). A slight concern is the dearth of New Zealand members this year and suggests that more needs to be done to retain members from "across the ditch". A full outline of the society's finances has been prepared by Treasurer, Celeste Linde.

#### **AMS Research Award**

There were a record 10 applications for this year's AMS research award. All submissions were of a high standard which made it challenging for the assessment panel but was also reassuring that there is such good mycological research being conducted in Australasia. This year's winner of the award was Amelia-Grace Boxshall, a PhD student from the School of Biosciences at the University of Melbourne. Amelia-Grace, who is supervised by Teresa Lebel, will use the funding to support an investigation into the morphological diversity, evolutionary history, and chemical variation of *Agaricus* in Australia. The project will yield a phylogeny of Southern Australian mushroom-like *Agaricus*, providing an evolutionary context for understanding the toxicity across this genus. The 2016 winner of the AMS Research Award was Cecilia Li from the Fungal Pathogenesis Laboratory at the Westmead Institute for Medical Research. Cecilia used the funding to support an investigation of the role of the inositol polyphosphate kinase pathway in cellular metabolism and energy production in the fungal pathogen, *Cryptococcus neoformans*. It is hoped that this research will lead to the identification of potential antifungal drug targets against the pathogen.

#### **AMS monthly newsletter, website and student Facebook page**

The AMS monthly newsletter continued to be e-mailed to members throughout 2017. The newsletter highlighted conferences, workshops and forays, situations vacant, new publications, mycological media occurrences and reminded (probably a little annoyingly) about renewing memberships. The newsletter continued to feature a popular "fungus of the month" item and in 2016-2017 this highlighted a diversity of taxa including coral fungi, bird's

nest fungi, in vitro cultures and plant pathogens. Dee Carter continued to oversee the AMS website and did a fabulous job of formatting the two new webpages on fungal conservation and fungal education. The AMS student Facebook page, run capably by Jemima Wixedt, continued to feature striking fungal photographs and news items and trivia on the world of fungi. The Facebook page is visited regularly by AMS and non-AMS members as indicated by comments and “Likes”.

### **AMS subcommittee in Fungal Education**

The new AMS webpage for Fungal Education was launched in April 2017 (URL at <http://www.australasianmycologicalsociety.com/mycology-education-subcommittee>). The page outlines the background to the formation of the AMS Fungal Education subcommittee, provides an introduction to the biology of fungi (including features of fungi, basic taxonomy and ecological and economic roles of fungi) and overviews Australasian tertiary courses that teach aspects of mycology. The AMS subcommittee met by Zoom teleconference and via Google Group throughout 2017 to discuss issues regarding the teaching of mycology in Australasian universities. A potential new initiative involves adding laboratory exercises in mycology which could be used at a secondary school or tertiary level, to the website.

### **AMS subcommittee in Fungal Conservation**

The Australasian Fungi Conservation Group (AFCG), a formal subcommittee of the AMS, launched its webpage on the Society’s site in July 2017 (URL at <https://www.australasianmycologicalsociety.com/australasian-fungi-conservation-group>). The page introduces the need for conservation of fungal taxa, provides background on the AFCG and its proposed roles in Australasian fungal conservation and describes several threatened fungal species (including two that are red-listed by the IUCN). The AFCG is co-convened by Tom May (RBG Melbourne) and Peter Buchanan (Landcare Research, NZ) and has conducted discussions via a Google Group (this has facilitated sending emails to members, while creating an archive of all posts to the group). The AFCG will use Google Drive to store documents, such as biodiversity strategies, legislation, conservation assessments and relevant research literature. It is likely that the AFCG’s webpage will be expanded considerably over the next few years

### **2018 scientific meeting**

Next year’s AMS scientific meeting will be held in conjunction with the ASM at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, Southbank. At this stage, there will be a combined half day of mycological talks on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> July and a full day of AMS sessions likely at the University of Queensland on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup>. A fungal foray to a local mycological hotspot will possibly occur on the afternoon of Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> and a conference dinner will likely be held on the evening of the Thursday to conclude proceedings. Note the meeting will precede IMC11 in Puerto Rico which will be held from 16-21<sup>st</sup> July. More information on the joint AMS-ASM meeting will be forthcoming via the Society’s monthly newsletter.

In closing, I would like to thank the AMS Council of Julie Djordjevic, Leona Campbell, Celeste Linde, Bevan Weir and Jeff Powell for their support over the last three years. I need also to single out Dee Carter for running the AMS webpage so well, Dee and Diana Leemon for providing valuable advice over my period of tenure, Pam and David Catcheside for their steady influence as AMS Patrons, Jemima Wixted and Susan Nuske for keeping the student Facebook updated with quirky mycological news and Sapphire McMullan-Fisher and Tom May for helping establish the new AMS subcommittees in fungal education and conservation, respectively. I wish the new Council every success over the next few years and am happy to leave the AMS in the sure hands of Leona Campbell.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J.D.W.D.' followed by a stylized flourish.

John Dearnaley, 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2017