

## THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN SIMULIIDAE SYMPOSIA

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**ABSTRACT** – The origin of the Central European Simuliidae research groups encouraged by Walter Rühm from the 1970's onwards is described. Twelve German Simuliidae symposia were held biannually from 1980 to 2000. The meeting was raised to the level of a European Simuliidae symposia in 1996 and to that of an international Simuliidae symposium in 2004, when it was held in association with the British Simuliid Group (BSG) for the first time.

**KEY WORDS:** Simuliidae, symposia, history, blackflies

### INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970's the importance of research on blackflies as vectors of onchocerciasis ("river blindness") increased. At the same time *Simulium (Boopthora) erythrocephalum* became important as a pest species in Northern Germany. Walter Rühm gathered a group of students to work on blackfly related problems at the University of Hamburg, while Peter Wenk concurrently encouraged similar studies in Tübingen.

#### German Simuliidae symposia

Organized from 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> September 1980 by Walter Rühm, the First German Simuliidae Symposium made possible the exchange of research experiences between German simuliidologists at the University of Hamburg. Being Austrian, the author was the only "foreigner" at this meeting. The purpose of the symposium was:

"... to give German-speaking scientists the possibility to discuss their research results and to encourage students to work on blackfly-related problems. One of the aims was to keep the group small enough to be able to exchange ideas within two days. A third day reserved for an excursion should be included in future symposia." (RÜHM, 1980).



Fig. 1. The pioneers. The First German Simuliidae Symposium. First row, left to right: Zwick, Grunewald, Garms, Wenk, Rühm; second row, second from left, the author; in front of the University of Hamburg, 1980.

In the following years the symposium was held biannually at: Konstanz (1982), Tübingen (1984), Schlitz (1986), Hamburg (1988), Grietherbusch (1990), and Essen (1992). The latter was the first symposium in which a group of Slovakian researchers established by Ladislav Jedlička took part.

After the fall of the “iron curtain” and the unification of Germany, the Eighth German Simuliidae Symposium was held in Cottbus (former DDR) in 1994. This was an opportunity to give a bigger group of scientists the possibility of participation. Organized by the author, the next symposium was held for the first time outside Germany, in Austria at the Veterinary University of Vienna.

#### European Simuliidae symposia

In 1996 for the first time, scientists from Italy and Norway took part in the symposium in Vienna. This was as a result of losses in cattle in Austria and Italy caused by Simuliidae in the



Fig. 2. Seventh German Simuliidae Symposium. First row, left to right: Gesine Schütte, Heino Christl; second row, left to right: Tobias Timm, Ellen Kiel, Daniela Illesova, Viera Stloukalova, Ladislav Jedlička, Doreen Werner, Heide Zwick; in the background: Joachim Reidelbach, Gunther Seitz, Manfred Car, Walter Rühm, Ralf Garms, Jörg Grunewald, Alfons Renz, Peter Betke.



Fig. 3. Prof. Kutzer, pioneer of postwar blackfly research in Austria (left), Prof. Jedlička in the background at the First Central European Simuliidae Symposium.

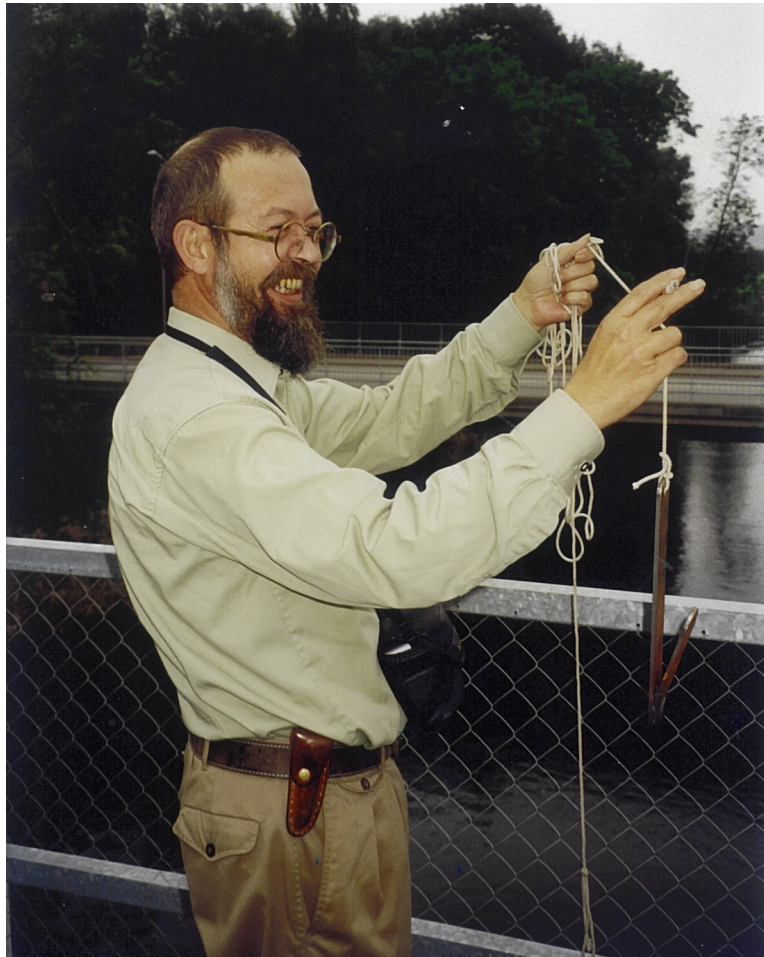


Fig. 4. The Danish taxonomist Frank Jensen, organizer of the symposium in Aarhus.

spring of 1996. Called both the Ninth German Simuliidae Symposium and the First Central European Simuliidae Symposium, a big step towards internationalization because talks were also held in English for the first time. The next venues were Aarhus/Denmark (1998), Vechta/Germany (2000), and Bratislava/Slovakia (2002). The symposium in Bratislava (the 12<sup>th</sup> German / Fourth European Simuliidae Symposium) was the last one to be called a German symposium.

#### International Simuliidae symposia

The next step was taken by Doreen Werner who in 2004 arranged the First International Simuliidae Symposium in Berlin. Lectures were held in English at this meeting, which was also entitled the Fifth European Simuliidae Symposium. Time had changed, the world had become smaller, and Walter Rühm (the founder of the symposium idea) unfortunately passed away in 2003.





Fig. 5. First International Simuliidae Symposium – Fifth European Simuliidae Symposium, held from 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> September 2004 in Berlin.

This symposium was held in combination with the 26th annual meeting of the British Simuliid Group.

In point of fact, the British Simuliid Group meetings started at about the same time as the German meetings, but they were held annually, so this was the 26<sup>th</sup>. The Berlin meeting would have been the 13<sup>th</sup> German one according to Rühm's calculations.

Just as Cottbus had been the first locality outside the borders of Western Germany to hold a Simuliidae Symposium in 1994, Novi Sad became the first locality outside the European Union to offer simuliidologists from all over the world the possibility of exchanging ideas in 2006. The Second International Simuliidae Symposium – Sixth European Simuliidae Symposium took place from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> September 2006 and was organized by Aleksandra I. Čupina. Again it was held in association with the British Simuliid Group.

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