Editorial: Special issue of the 28th Conference of European Comparative Endocrinologists (CECE-2016) - Golden Jubilee of the European Society for Comparative Endocrinology (ESCE)

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We are very pleased to introduce to the readers of General and Comparative Endocrinology this special issue of the 28th Conference of European Comparative Endocrinologists, CECE-2016. This international conference was held on 21-25 August 2016, and took place in the historic centre of Leuven, a famous city situated close to the Belgian and European capital, Brussels. The University of Leuven (KU Leuven) was founded in 1425, making it the oldest university in the Low Countries. Today, KU Leuven ranks as one of the largest and most renowned universities in Europe. We were therefore very proud that our attendees were welcomed by Prof. Rik Torfs, the Rector of KU Leuven, at the Opening Ceremony of CECE-2016 in the historic University Halls on Sunday, August 21st.

At CECE 2016 we also had the great honour of celebrating the 50th anniversary of the European Society for Comparative Endocrinology (ESCE), which endorses the CECE conferences. In this fascinating 'omics' era, comparative studies are gaining momentum, and the ESCE is promoting endocrinological research of all organisms at the molecular, cellular, systemic and evolutionary levels. Furthermore, it strives to integrate the field of comparative endocrinology with many related disciplines including biochemistry, physiology, neurobiology, immunology and ecology. Meetings are organized every other year and travel support is provided for young investigators. Interested parties are invited to visit the ESCE website (<http://www.escendo.info/>) where they can also apply for membership of this international society. Several conference events were inspired by this Golden Jubilee, such as the opening address given by Horst-Werner Korf, the current ESCE President, the welcome reception in the historic Jubilee Hall of the university, the celebration of Arnold De Loof and Dan Larhammar, both Honorary Presidents of the ESCE, and the introduction of the ESCE Young Investigator Awards (see below).

For the conference, great efforts were made by the organizers to ensure both a stimulating scientific programme and an enjoyable stay in Leuven. The programme included five invited plenary lectures that were carefully selected by the Scientific Committee of CECE-2016. These lectures were given by Pierre Leopold (Nice, France), Marc Caron (Durham, North Carolina, USA), Charlotte Cornil (Liège, Belgium), Anna Wargelius (Bergen, Norway) and Takashi Yoshimura (Nagoya, Japan). In addition, 23 half-day sessions covered a total number of 150 oral communications that were distributed over different symposia: Hormones in Development and Reproduction; Osmoregulation; Neurobiology and Behaviour; Molecular and Functional Evolution of GPCRs; Signalling Pathways in Immunity; Endocrine Disruption; Feeding and Metabolism; Novel Hormones and Receptors in the Animal Kingdom; Omics and Physiology of Insect Neuropeptides; Functions of Steroids, their Receptors and Binding Proteins; Model Organisms in Comparative Endocrinology and Neurobiology; Comparative Genomics and Evolution; Regulation of Thyroid Hormone Action at Multiple Levels; Endocrinology and Chronobiology; Stress and Adaption. Two special symposia were presented as joint initiatives with CECE 2016: the *International GPCR Symposium* organized by Marc Parmentier (Brussels, Belgium) as part of the Belgian Interuniversity Attraction Poles programme (BELSPO - IAP P7/40 "G protein-coupled receptors: from structures to functionally validated targets"), and the *Leopoldina Symposium on Seasonal Rhythms* that was organized by Horst-Werner Korf (Frankfurt, Germany) under the auspices of the *Leopoldina Nationale Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Another symposium was uniquely dedicated to presentations by young investigators. Furthermore, there were four poster sessions, one of which (on Monday evening) was accompanied by extra food and drinks. Finally, at the end of the conference the ESCE Young Investigator Awards were conferred for the first time ever: Anne Houbrechts (Belgium) and Martin Zurl (Austria) received the awards for the best oral

presentations, while Gabriella Köblös (Hungary) and Marijke Gijbels (Belgium) received the awards for the best poster presentations.

Major social events included the Welcome Reception at KU Leuven's Jubilee Hall (Sunday 21st August), and the Social Banquet in the Faculty Club at the Groot Begijnhof UNESCO World Heritage Site (Wednesday 24th August). Different options for an excursion were offered for the Tuesday afternoon (August 23rd). For accompanying persons, an interesting and affordable programme was made available to discover more of Leuven and Belgium.

We are very grateful to everyone who assisted in the organization of this international meeting. In particular, we would like to thank the Conference Office at KU Leuven, the local collaborators, session organizers, scientific committees, suppliers, and financial sponsors. Furthermore, we would like to thank all our attendees, who contributed so positively to CECE 2016 and its associated symposia.

As guest editors of this special issue, we gratefully thank all authors who submitted a manuscript, and we are now very proud to present this new issue to the readers of this journal.

Finally, we would already like to draw your attention to CECE 2018, the 29th Conference of European Comparative Endocrinologists, which will be organized in Glasgow, UK on 19-23 August 2018 (<http://cece2018.org/>).

Accompanying text with two pictures:

Picture 1: Group picture of the 28th Conference of European Comparative Endocrinologists (CECE 2016) taken in front of the Alma 2 university restaurant (Leuven, Belgium) on Wednesday (August 24, 2016) at noon time. (Credit is given to Darron Cullen and Jornt Spit, photographers at the conference.)

Picture 2: ESCE President Horst-Werner Korf (right) congratulating CECE 2016 organizer Jozef Vanden Broeck (left) with a successful completion of the conference at the Closing Ceremony on Thursday 25th August, 2016. Dr. Vanden Broeck and Dr. Korf are the Guest Editors of this special issue. (Credit is given to Darron Cullen and Jornt Spit, photographers at the conference.)