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28th European Congress of Arachnology, Turin, Italy

It was with great pleasure that I received the Society of Biology Travel Grant to support my attendance at the 28th European Congress of Arachnology (ECA), in Turin, Italy. The congress was a great opportunity for me to network and discuss topics that are relatively new to me as an undergraduate researcher.

What was also particularly useful was to receive feedback on my own research during the poster presentation, and consulting experts in a field that I am very new to. Not just was it great to hear new ideas for future work and expert interpretations of my results, but also it was wonderful to be exposed to the work of other arachnologists in an informal, social setting. Although the research I presented is also being published in the journal of the British Arachnological Society, *Arachnology*, the ability for face-to-face discussion during the ECA and other conferences is something that is of huge value. Attending ECA also gave rise to relationships with colleagues with whom I look forward to collaborating in the future.



The research I presented in the poster sessions took place after accidentally coming across a male *Saitis barbipes* when I was on a field trip in southern France for part of my undergraduate degree in zoology at The University of Manchester. *S. barbipes* is a jumping spider (Family Salticidae) that is distributed across southern Europe, and males are known to exhibit elaborate displays with their third pair of legs (see Hervé Antoine's video, http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x7qmpz_saitis_animals).

Oliver (left) discusses his research during the 28th European Congress of Arachnology, in Turin, Italy.

Surprisingly, there has been very little published on both the subject of the displays of these beautiful males, and the species in general. Following collection of several specimens, I set up trials during which males were observed in encounters with either a female or another male. During these trials, the behaviour of the displaying males was recorded on video and later analyzed. This allowed me to classify 10 different gestures from the displays I saw. Two of these gestures were used towards both sexes, but the majority of the gestures were used exclusively in courtship. The gesture classification also made it possible to identify the beginning of courtship objectively. In addition, by splitting the displays into individual gestures, variations in display composition can now more easily be measured. This could be particularly useful in investigating the properties of displays performed by males that female *S. barbipes* prefer.

I hope that this research leads to work that may answer some important questions about sexual signals in spiders and for animals in general: *S. barbipes* certainly deserves more attention from the scientific community as a model to test sexual signalling theory.

As an undergraduate researcher, my work was not funded. Also, because I do not earn a salary, attendance at an international conference really requires funding from societies like the Society of Biology. This Travel Grant is thankfully a source of funding for undergraduate researchers, and I am very grateful that I was awarded one. I really hope that the *Society* continues to offer it to younger researchers who find it difficult to attract funding from other funding bodies.