

Parasitic helminths: New perspectives in biology and infection

The purpose of my travel was to present at *Parasitic Helminths: New Perspectives in Biology and Infection*, a conference held annually in Hydra, Greece. The meeting was a forum for applied and basic research in helminths and ways to improve human health. It involved research leaders supported by major funders and institutions and provided a major platform to work and liaise directly with partner researchers in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Central and South America.

The meeting consisted of a diverse series of sessions, covering host-parasite interactions, immunological response during infection, drug development, response and resistance and helminth evolution and ecosystems, amongst others. There were two poster presentation sessions and each poster presenter had an opportunity to do a two minute 'poster pitch' to promote their work. There were three informal dinners and lots of short breaks where delegates had the opportunity to be involved in informal discussions. A series of unusual weather events made the entire experience extra memorable.

I presented my work on assessing genetic diversity of soil-transmitted helminths globally for diagnostics development and validation, having secured an extremely large sample cohort, with the support from the London Centre for NTD Research and DeWorm3. These parasitic worms afflict nearly 1.5 billion people worldwide. With no vaccines available and the potential emergence of drug resistance to the few existing treatment options, early and reliable diagnosis of infection is of tremendous importance. During the conference, I addressed how genetic variation in parasites isolated from different parts of the world affects the way current molecular diagnostics work with implications for future investments in monitoring and treatment.



Marina Papaïakovou presenting at Parasitic Helminths: New Perspectives in Biology and Infection, Greece, 2023.

The travel grant provided an opportunity to connect with new and established colleagues and present new data that highlights the need for properly evaluated diagnostics markers. I received great feedback from all delegates, had fruitful conversations, and I have already secured additional samples from Costa Rica, Liberia and Kenya (pending official approval).

The entire conference offered a unique atmosphere of concentrated science, interactive discussions, and generous opportunities for informal follow-ups, suitable for promoting research on multiple levels.

During the meeting I was invited by the Editor-in-Chief of *Trends in Parasitology*, Dr. Pengfei Kong, to summarise one of the sessions (Session 1: Host-parasite interactions), which will be part of a published TrendsTalk article to promote conference highlights with a broader audience. The organisers recommended 12 young scientists and early-career researchers as potential authors of this TrendsTalk, and I was honoured to be one of them.

This was my first time attending and presenting my research as a PhD student, representing the University of Cambridge and the London Centre for NTD Research. I am fantastically grateful to the Centre for supporting my participation. It was a unique and very special experience to me.

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