



2017 – a retrospection

The year started out with fantastic news: Judy was awarded the prestigious Heisenberg Fellowship from the German Research Foundation (DFG) to conduct research on the topic “Woody Plants – Interactions and Resource Allocation Strategies” or short “Woody PIRATS”. With this, the Plant Interactions Ecophysiology Group came to life which at that time meant Judy, Andrea and Sarah. We also launched the new group website at www.plantinteractionsecophysiology.com and on facebook “@TheSimonLab”. In September, Sabine Debiche from Deviche Designs drew up a great group comic:



With regards to research, several projects continued or started in 2017. In spring, Andrea celebrated her last day at the lab bench when she finished the lab work for her PhD project on “Nitrogen acquisition strategies between native and invasive species”. Sarah started her Bachelor project in spring, studying nitrogen metabolites in leaves and litter of different temperate species, which she successfully defended in August. A joined project – funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) – with Mark van Kleunen and Tom Lachaise from the Ecology Group at the University of Konstanz started in April. In July, Robert joined the group to start his PhD on the “Consequences of competition and abiotic factors on the acquisition and internal allocation of nitrogen in temperate woody species”, a project also funded by the DFG. After the summer, Tamalika joined the group with a Bridge Scholarship for PostDocs from the University of Konstanz to work on the question whether drought-driven tree mortality is diminished with increasing tree species diversity. Throughout the year, several student assistants joined the group for short- or long-term support to help with preparations for experiments, harvests, and on our first group field trip. Thus, a big thank you goes to Sarah Stahl, Yanan Zhang, Janina Käppel, Steffi Dörr, Inna Koleber, Anna Brumer, Liridon Hoxha, Donard Geci, Franziska Spanner, Sophie Mast, Leon Franke, and Aileen Trost.

We were also very active in- and outside the lab and office, participating in conferences and events such as the Swedish OIKOS Congress in Lund, Sweden (February), the March for Science in Freiburg, Germany

(April), PopBio 2017 in Halle, Germany (May), IUFRO - 125th anniversary congress 2017 in Freiburg, Germany (September), the EMBO "Seeing is Believing" Symposium in Heidelberg, Germany (October), and the Joint Annual Meeting of the BES and GfÖ in Gent, Belgium (December).

A new collaboration with Nico Eisenhauer (Experimental Interaction Ecology Group, iDiv, University of Leipzig, Germany) was initiated in spring followed by our MyDiv field campaign in August. Judy also visited the Adamczyk Lab in Helsinki, Finland, in June for two weeks to learn new techniques related to chemical defence in trees. Apart from presenting our work, learning new methods, and being updated on the current status in our field of research, we were also busy in the greenhouse: Robert celebrated his first major harvest in July/August. However, the group's largest achievement was most likely the planting of 4,900 tree seedlings into c. 700 mesocosms filled with over 21,000 kg of sand/vermiculite over 6 days in December for Robert's experiments in 2018, regardless of snow, rain, or – although rare – sunshine.

Making use of the remaining time as well as possible, we published 2 review articles, 5 original research articles, 1 editorial and 1 ebook. As far as funding for new projects is concerned, we were also very successful: Projects starting in 2018 include the life assessment of competition for nitrogen in the rhizosphere using new transparent soil microcosms in collaboration with Lionel Dupuy from James Hutton Institute, Dundee, Scotland, UK (111,000€), the quantification of organic nitrogen fluxes in the rhizosphere in collaboration with Sandra Jämtgard from SLU in Umea, Sweden (11,000€), and further investigations on woody plant interactions (10,000€).

So, overall, 2017 was a very good year for us and we plan to continue like this also for 2018. The group will continue to grow with the start of the new projects. If you are interested in our work and would like to join us, check out our website and/or contact us.