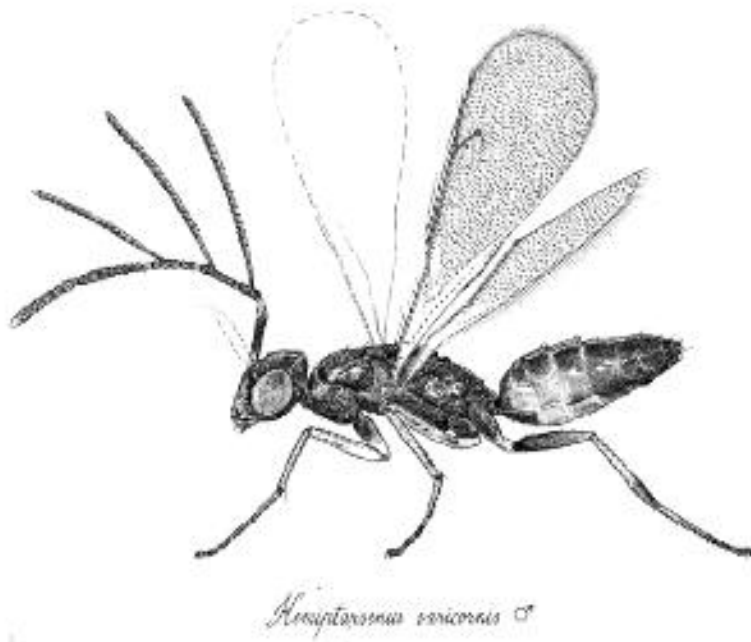




MYRMECIA



News Bulletin of the Australian Entomological Society Inc.
Volume 56, Part 2, May 2020





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**XXVI International
Congress of Entomology**
HELSINKI, FINLAND, JULY 19–24, 2020

International congresses in the age of pandemics – 26th ICE in Helsinki

International Congresses of Entomology have been organised over a period of more than 100 years. The legacy of the previous 25 ICE congresses, and their influence on the area of entomology during a century, gives an intriguing motivation to live up to great expectations and to organise the 26th ICE in Helsinki, Finland. In the context of our contemporary world, congresses are vital to the success of our discipline of entomology. Congresses enhance, stimulate and create knowledge, innovation and collaboration. Professional collegiality, networking and knowledge sharing by delegates and the companies or organizations that they represent, are vital components of hosting congresses.

We prepared our bid approximately 4-5 years ago, for the privilege to organise the 26th International Congress of Entomology: ICE2020Helsinki. The range of countries bidding for this event was small, a fact which is reflected also in the prospect that for 2024 only one or two countries apparently are preparing to submit a bid. We think that this reflects the enormous workload involved - mostly voluntary work by the organizing team, the high expenses associated with it, and the economic insecurity associated with this endeavor.

We know from European colleagues that many of them considered to bid for ICE2020 and would have liked to organise the congress – but did not prepare a bid, because the risks of the whole operation in the end fall on the organizing team. This includes personal economic risks for example for high down-payment requests for the venue, for which usually no mechanisms exist to cover them. Please be reminded that the excellent conditions which the ESA had for ICE2016 (Orlando, Florida) by getting the congress venue for free from the city of Orlando, we do not have in Helsinki. We also depend on the good-will of hundreds of volunteers globally. We received this enormous support, and we hope that all entomological societies globally encourage their members to support us during the coming months to get the 26th ICE successfully organised in Helsinki next year.

To organise a congress, multiple skills are required. The congress host needs to work with those individuals who are willing, and in a position to influence directly or indirectly the congress decisions by the professional institutions to which they belong. To enable this, we at the 26th ICE in Helsinki have relied on scientists, academic leaders, business leaders and political and social leaders and commentators.

This international cooperation includes a long-term commitment stretching over more than four years (in our case over more than five years) of the organizing committee to create and establish the program. It is our mandate to ensure alignment of the objectives with those of the key stakeholders in the area of entomology. The organisers need a core-group of hundreds of people distributed globally who have a long-term commitment to the ICE congresses. Our thanks to the section organisers, symposium organisers, sponsors, exhibitors, volunteers, the ICE council (see listings at the congress website: www.ice2020helsinki.fi), and above all, congress participants. This effort has resulted in over 250 fantastic scientific symposia being arranged for ICE2020Helsinki over a period of 6 days on topics covering all aspects of entomology.

During March 2020 we were facing a difficult decision, with only two options concerning the organization of the 26th ICE in Helsinki:

1. keep to our original schedule and host the Congress on 19-24 July 2020 in Helsinki, or
2. postpone the Congress by one year to the only available alternative dates: 18-23 July 2021

Implications of these options include:

1. It was obvious that restrictions on travel due to the pandemic would severely limit attendance. For the most part, these restrictions were imposed in mid-March, after our deadline of 1 March to cancel registrations and to be eligible for refunds.
2. Given the impracticality of hosting a Congress without the participation of many of the world's entomologists, we decided to postpone the Congress by a year at a time when travel restrictions would ostensibly be lifted, and participants allowed to travel again. This decision was made in good faith and in order to provide the world entomological community the congress they deserve. This postponement allows you to attend the congress next year, and not to lose the registration fees as would have happened under option (1).

We are determined to hold ICE2020Helsinki in July 2021. We believe that flexibility and resourcefulness are required given the current situation. For example, funding agencies are extending their grant expiration and reporting deadlines, because currently hardly anyone can conduct research as planned. Therefore, we would urge those who are affected by the policies of granting agencies to approach them and request flexibility in this unusual situation.

Allowing the transfer of the registration to another person appears to be a workable alternative for all parties. Here we urge national entomological societies to establish at their Facebook site a trading service for their members to enable selling and buying of registrations to the 26th ICE in Helsinki. Facilitating trading at the national level makes contacting and payments easy, compared with international money transfers.

In this situation, we all need to be willing to invest time and energy to find solutions. Just as we at the ICE2020Helsinki organising team have invested our time and work in the past years, we pledge to continue that investment in the months to come, for the benefit of the world entomological community. We have the will to host the 26th ICE congress in 2021 as announced. I hope you share our determination.

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