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Preface

The nine papers in the present volume are a selection of the presentations given at the 4th International Meeting on Plant Litter Processing in Freshwaters (PLPF4) which was held in Toulouse (France) from the 25 to the 28 of July, 2005. As with the three previous PLPF meetings (Bilbao, Spain in 1997; Lunz, Austria in 2000; Szentendre, Hungary in 2002)¹, invitations were sent to ecologists and biologists concerned with various aspects of the decomposition of plant matter in aquatic environments.

Sixty-two participants attended the PLPF4 meeting in Toulouse. Clearly, the European focus of the first meetings of this series was expanded to a worldwide dimension as 40% of the 20 countries represented in Toulouse were non-European.

The program included 5 invited review presentations, 39 short communications and 8 poster displays which covered different topics organized into 6 sessions (I. Functional stream assessment; II. Biodiversity and litter decomposition; III. Litter decomposition in wetlands; IV. Litter dynamics in streams; V. Invertebrate detritivores. VI. Microbial decomposers).

The following papers illustrate the complementarity of current research on plant matter decomposition in aquatic habitats. The paper by J. SCHLIEF and M. MUTZ highlights the importance of leaf litter leachates as determinant of microbial activity, while C. CANHOTO and C. LARANJEIRA show that such decomposition end-products may be toxic to invertebrates when originating from eucalyptus, and concentrating in intermittent streams. The effects of drought on litter decomposition are also assessed at a larger scale, that of a Mediterranean river basin (F. SANGIORGIO, A. FONNESU and G. MANCINELLI). The papers by J. CHARA, D. BAIRD, T. TELFER and L. GIRALDO and M. S. MORETTI, J. F. GONÇALVES, R. LIGEIRO and M. CALLISTO report contrasting results on the dynamics of shredders associated with the decomposition of various leaf litter species in tropical streams. The contributions of G. MANCINELLI, M. L. COSTANTINI and L. ROSSI and S. ALEMANNI, G. MANCINELLI and A. BASSET deal with trophic relationships in standing waters, and with the consideration of top-down process control and an attempt at the compartment modelling of decomposers, respectively. N. SANMARTÍ and M. MENÉNDEZ provide new insights into the interactions between litter nutrients, fungi and meiofauna on bullrush litter decomposition in a brackish wetland. Finally, the study by G. MANCINELLI, L. SABETTA and F. SANGIORGIO reveals how changes in sampling frequency may affect the determination of litter decomposition rates.

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¹ The tradition of three-year intervals in this series will be continued with the next PLPF meeting which will be held in Coimbra, Portugal from the 23 to the 26 of July 2008 (<http://www.uc.pt/plpf5/>).

USA), LARS TRANVIK (Univ. Uppsala, Sweden), MARIA LEICHTFRIED (Austrian Academy of Sciences, Mondsee, Austria), JESÚS POZO (Univ. Bilbao, Spain), LUZ BOYERO (James Cook Univ. Townsville, Australia), MANUEL A. S. GRAÇA (Univ. Coimbra, Portugal), MICKY TACKX (Univ. Toulouse III, France), BJÖRN MALMQVIST (Univ. Umeå, Sweden), FRANÇOIS GUÉROLD (Univ. Metz, France), MICHAEL K. DOBSON (Manchester Metropolitan Univ., UK) and ODILE FOSSATI (Research for Development Institute, Montpellier, France).

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