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2020 Virtual Meeting Report

Because of the global pandemic, the society was forced to cancel its annual meeting scheduled to be held in Davis, California. The co-hosts of that meeting, Jason Bond and Joel Ledford, graciously agreed to host the meeting at the University of California, Davis in 2021.

AAS President, Greta Binford, decided to host the first ever 2020 AAS Virtual Summer Symposium via Zoom June 25 – 29. As of this newsletter publication, abstracts and the schedule of the meeting are still posted at <https://aas2020.watzekdi.net/> [password “pedipalp”]. Four hundred eighty five people registered for this virtual meeting – breaking all attendance records for the Society! Members joined us from around the world, and nonmembers attended for a \$10 donations that raised over \$1,600. The virtual meeting began with an excellent Keynote address by Martín Ramírez honoring Norman Platnick entitled “From roots to myriad leaves: The legacy of Norman Platnick in spider systematics.” A recording of this talk is available at the meeting website and will be archived on the AAS website.

- Susan R. Kennedy, postdoc, Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology, and University of Trier, Germany for “From field to museum: Harnessing the power of third generation sequencing to establish a simple and cost-effective multiplex approach for spider taxonomy.”
- Shahan Derkarabetian, postdoc, Harvard University for “Species delimitation and evolutionary history of a widespread, and potentially cryptic, species complex in North America (Opiliones: Laniatores: Cosmetidae).”
- Fedra Ariana Bollatti, postdoc, Laboratorio de Biología Reproductiva y Evolución, Instituto de Diversidad y Ecología Animal, UNC-CONICET, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Córdoba (Argentina) for “Alternative reproductive tactics in male wolf spiders with sex-role reversal.”

In Memoriam



The Arachnological community lost several members in 2020. In January, we received notice of the sudden and unexpected death of **Dr. JoAnne Sewlal**, an instructor at the University of the West Indies and one of the pre-eminent arachnologists in the Caribbean region. JoAnne died at the age of 40 of an acute allergic reaction. She was born in Point Fortin, earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees at the UWI in St. Augustine. When she was a student in Dr. Chris Starr’s entomology course, he mentioned to the class that he was the ranking expert on spiders in the Eastern Caribbean region “not because I am especially good in the subject – I’m pretty much just a dabbler – but just because there is no real specialist in the group.” He mentioned to the class that

there was a good professional niche open for anyone who wanted to become the *real* expert. “At the end of class,” Chris said, “JoAnne came up to me and told me that that’s what she wanted, to be the region’s ranking expert.” And that is exactly what she became. She authored 46 scientific publications and over 600 general publications on ecology, environmental issues, and biodiversity of spiders in the Caribbean. She also was the co-founder and co-coordinator of the Point Fortin Chess Centre. She said that her “greatest passions are increasing public awareness of the environment and the challenges it faces as well as giving back to my community.” In her short life, she did all those things. JoAnne will be greatly missed by the arachnological community.



In April, the Arachnological community received word of the tragic death of a lion in the field, **Dr. Norm Platnick**. The following remembrance is an excerpt from a tribute prepared by Lorenzo Prendini, Curator of Arachnida and Myriapoda, Division of Invertebrate Zoology, with contributions and assistance from Will Platnick, Toby Schuh, Gustavo Hormiga, Martín Ramírez, Ricardo Botero-Trujillo, Lou Sorkin, Dave Grimaldi, Tim Crowe, Theo Blick, and Daniel Gloor: Dr. Norman Ira Platnick, Curator Emeritus at the

American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), New York, passed on April 8 in Philadelphia, PA, after a tragic accident. He married the late Nancy Stewart Price in 1970 and is survived by his son, William Durin Platnick, and daughter-in-law, Rebecca Ehrlich. Norm was born on December 30, 1951, in Bluefield, WV, where he grew up. Getting what he called a ‘precocious start,’ Norm became a college freshman at the tender age of 12, receiving a BS degree at 16, MS at 18, and PhD at 21. He has remarked that he lacked ‘a high school diploma, having made it only through grade 7’! The world authority on spiders, Norm’s lifelong interest began serendipitously while a teenager, majoring in Biology at Concord College, Athens, WV, as a direct consequence of meeting his future wife, Nancy, ‘at Concord on October 12, 1967.’ Their son, Will, maintains that his father’s passion for spiders started because he ‘tried to impress a girl.’ Nancy, also pursuing a BS in Biology, had taken a course on arthropods and become fascinated with millipedes. According to Will, ‘my mom was an excellent collector and, when she went out, my dad would tag along

to spend time with her.’ Norm was less successful at finding millipedes but collected spiders in abundance and tried to identify them back at college. The rest is history.

After graduating from Concord in 1968, Norm moved to Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, where he was advised by Richard Sauer and graduated with a MS in Zoology in 1970, and finally to Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, where he was advised by Ernst Mayr and Herbert Levi, and graduated with a PhD in Biology in 1973. He was appointed Assistant Curator in the AMNH Department of Entomology the same year, received tenure and promotion to Associate Curator in 1977, and promotion to Curator in 1982. He was awarded an endowed chair as Peter J. Solomon Family Curator of Spiders in 1998 and served in that capacity until retiring, whereupon he became Senior Scientist in Residence at the AMNH Division of Invertebrate Zoology (2010–2013).

As an AMNH Curator, Norm took over stewardship of the Collections of Arachnida and Myriapoda from John Cooke, building on the legacy of Willis J. Gertsch to continue developing the spider collection into the world’s largest and most taxonomically comprehensive, a global resource with over a million specimens and 4,000 types. Norm’s arachnological expeditions to Chile, as well as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, New Caledonia, New Zealand, and Panama, were supported by \$4.3 million in research grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Geographic Society, and other foundations. In addition to his position as Curator at the AMNH, Norm served as adjunct professor at City College, City University of New York (1978–2014), and Cornell University (1988–2014), and as adjunct senior research scientist for the Center of Environmental Research and Conservation at Columbia University (1999–2014).

Norm was a prolific scientist, publishing 330 papers, including 37 monographs, six books and two edited volumes over the course of his four-decade career. This exceptional body of work fundamentally affected several fields. In arachnology, the study of spiders and their kin, Norm laid the framework of spider classification and the Tree of Life early on, along with introducing new techniques, such as scanning electron microscopy, and character systems, such as spinneret morphology, which forever changed the course of spider systematics. His prodigious monographic revisions and many smaller papers, on most of which he was sole or lead author, added 158 new genera and 2,023 new species of spiders, vastly increasing knowledge of spider diversity on a global scale. An authority on at least ten spider families, Norm described taxa in some 50 of the 120 families currently recognized, spanning all three suborders, as well as the arachnid order Ricinulei (hooded tick-spiders), in which he described a new genus and 12 new species. His contributions, together with the [World Spider Catalog](#), which he created as a unified nomenclatural and taxonomic resource, and single-handedly updated annually over the course of two decades, elevated spiders to a unique position. In recognition of his contributions, Norm was made Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 2003 and received the Pierre Bonnet Award for Devoted Service to the Advancement of Arachnology in 2007, among other honors. Four spider genera, *Normplatnicka*, *Platnickia*, *Platnickina* and *Platnicknia* (= *Modisimus*) and 47 species of spiders, other arachnids, and a millipede are named after him.

In addition to his role as fellow, president or councilor of numerous scientific societies, several of which he was instrumental in founding, and his service on copious editorial boards and scientific panels, Norm leaves a rich legacy in education. He advised or served on the committees of over 20 students and postdoctoral fellows, many of whom went on to illustrious careers in arachnology and systematics, around the world, and delivered about 100 scientific lectures in the US and abroad. The original [spider man](#), Norm promoted the old adage ‘if you wish to live and thrive, let a spider run alive.’



Dr. Julia Reiskind, wife of arachnologist Jonathan Reiskind, died in Gainesville, Florida on 10 July 2020, two weeks after her 79th birthday. The following remembrance was provided by Dr. Ken Prestwich, Mary Jane West-Eberhard, and Bill Eberhard: Jon and Julia were an exemplary couple. They shared many interests, and had a special talent for being unusually active,