2024 President's Report

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY OF PLANT SCIENTISTS

Prof Martha Ludwig

The ASPS President and Executive are responsible for managing several activities each year.

Annual Meetings

Hobart 2023 – An in-person meeting with 15 sessions, including student-led, poster, and discussion sessions; more than 150 posters; and multiple social events in which attendees met, caught up, and planned collaborations. Kathleen Soole (Flinders University) delivered the R. N. Robertson Lecture, which incorporated a discussion session, and Christine Faulkner (John Innes Centre) gave the Annals of Botany Lecture. On behalf of the Society, huge thanks go to Eloise Foo and her team for the fantastic work they did in putting Hobart 2023 together!

ASPS 2024 – A combined in-person local and hybrid meeting with the New Zealand Society of Plant Scientists (NZSPB 2024). Local in-person meetings in Adelaide, Auckland, Brisbane, Christchurch, Melbourne, Palmerston North, Perth, Sydney, and online in Hobart. Local organisers developed bespoke meeting programs and activities. The two Societies shared a hybrid awards session. On behalf of ASPS, big thanks go to the local ASPS organisers and their teams: Crystal Sweetman, Zane Marks, Nipuni Thanthrige, Brett Williams, Dugald Reid, Lim Chee Liew, Janet Wheeler, Lucas Auroux, Judith Lichtenzveig , Mark Waters, Razlin Azman, Alistair Hockey, Kristine Crous, Rob Sharwood and Nijat Imin.

ASPS 2025 – Planned to be an in-person meeting in Adelaide.

ComBio 2026 – Planned to be an in-person meeting with the Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology and other societies (to be announced).

2024 ASPS Annual Awards

A major function of the Executive each year is to recognise excellence in research, teaching, training, and/or outreach. The Society is fortunate in being able to award members for their achievements with the support of corporate and individual donors. Applications for the awards are judged by highly regarded national and international scientists. While the identity of judges traditionally remains confidential, we can reveal that three scientists from Australia and overseas assessed the Goldacre Medal, three judged the Jan Anderson Award, and three Australian researchers ranked the Functional Plant Biology (FPB) Best Paper Prize. The ASPS Education and Outreach and the R. N. Robertson Travelling Awards were judged by the Executive and associated discipline representatives. I thank all the judges for their input and congratulate the following well-deserving winners:

Peter Crisp (University of Queensland) – Goldacre Medal
Jenny Mortimer (University of Adelaide) – Jan Anderson Award
Hoai Phan (University of Adelaide) – 2023 FPB Best paper by an ECR
Ashley Jones and Benjamin Schwessinger (Australian National University) – ASPS Education and Outreach Award
Sergey Shabala (University of Western Australia) – J. G. Wood Lecture
Alastair Hockey (University of Western Australia) and Nicole Thomson (University of Melbourne) – R.N. Robertson Travelling Scholarships (AH to Centre of Plant Structural and Functional Genomics, Institute of Experimental Botany, Czech Republic; NT to Max Planck Institute of Molecular Plant Physiology, Germany)

FPB continued to support the Goldacre and Best Paper Awards. Agrisera and the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Plant Success in Nature and Agriculture sponsored the Jan Anderson Award. The Society gives thanks and appreciation to these sponsors.

ASPS Website and Phytogen

Thyme Studio was chosen by the Executive to redevelop the Society's website. Many thanks to Janet Wheeler for overseeing potential providers, her on-going management of the ASPS website, and for responding to suggested updates and edits throughout the year. We aim to have the new website fully functional in early 2025. A big thank you also to Phytogen editors Razlin Azman and Lucas Auroux. Phytogen plays an important role in keeping the Society visible and its membership up-to-date and engaged with Society news and events in the national and international plant science communities.

Closer Ties with the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists and the American Society of Plant Biologists

Reciprocal registration arrangements exist for members of the New Zealand Society of Plant Biologists (NZSPB) and ASPS for the annual meetings of the societies. The Presidents of the two societies are also on both society email lists and jobs can be advertised on both society sites by members. ASPS 2024 and NZSPB 2024 shared their awards sessions (see above). Talks are on-going with the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB) to also have a reciprocal conference registration arrangement and webinars driven by ASPS and ASPB ECRs with common research interests.

CSIRO Publishing/Functional Plant Biology

Under a new agreement with FPB, the journal is now the official journal of ASPS. The journal will continue to sponsor the FPB-ASPS Best Paper and Goldacre Awards. Beginning in 2025, in addition to submitting a paper for publication in FPB, the winner of the Goldacre Award will also organise submission of at least three other papers, resulting in "Goldacre Special Issues".

Two new initiatives are also in the new FPB-ASPS agreement. 1) A Liaison Editor position will be created on the journal's editorial board. This member will be nominated from the ASPS membership and their role will be to liaise between ASPS and FPB on matters of interest regarding FPB and to commission high quality papers from ASPS, including those for "Conference Special Issues". It is a 2-3 year position. 2) Support for a Travelling Speaker Award in ComBio years, beginning with ComBio 2026. The recipient of the Award must submit an authored or co-authored paper and commission seven other papers for a "Conference Special Issue". The intent is that these papers result from a ComBio symposium in the Travelling Speaker's research discipline. The Liaison Editor will assist in commissioning the papers.

Annals of Botany

In 2024, as there was no in-person meeting of ASPS, Annals of Botany (AoB) supported a Travelling Lectureship Award to commence in 2025. The intention of the Lectureship is to promote networking and potential collaborations for an early- or mid-career researcher as they establish their research programs and laboratories. Four researchers were identified from the ASPS membership as being at this stage of their careers and were invited to submit an expression of interest (EoI), including a statement of interest, the plan for the lectureship, an approximate budget, anticipated outcomes, and a commitment to submit a paper to AoB. Three EoIs were received and reviewed by a panel of established ASPS researchers. Caitlin Moore (University of Western Australia) is the recipient.

AoB have further committed to supporting an AoB Speaker Award, as they have in the past, for in-person meetings. The outcomes of this support will be multiple papers, including an authored or co-authored original paper from the Speaker, resulting from a conference symposium organised around the Speaker's discipline.

Global Plant Council

The membership of the Global Plant Council (GPC) represents organisations involved in plant biology, agriculture, and environmental sciences around the globe. The Council aims to support those involved in scientific research, teaching, and training; increase awareness of plant science in academia and society; and encourage international collaboration. Peter Ryan (Past President ASPS) is the current ASPS representative on the GPC Board. Many thanks to Peter for engaging with GPC and representing the ASPS.

Science and Technology Australia / Science Meets Parliament

Science and Technology Australia (STA) is Australia's peak body for science and technology professionals from more than 130 member organisations. Its purpose is to conduct education and outreach programs, "bringing together scientists, scientific societies, governments, industry and the broader community" and it campaigns to influence public policy in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)-related areas (https://scienceandtechnologyaustralia.org.au). During the year I represented ASPS at the online STA annual general meeting; a consultation meeting for preparing a list of election priorities, covering the key issues for the STEM sector for the upcoming 2025 Federal election, and voted in the STA Board elections.

Each year STA organises their hallmark event "Science Meets Parliament" (SMP). ASPS sponsored Lim Chee Liew (La Trobe University) and Nijat Imin (Western Sydney University) to attend SMP in March 2024. Activities included professional development opportunities, small group meetings with members of the Australian Parliament, attendance at a parliamentary session, a National Press Club Address, and the National Gala dinner. On behalf of the ASPS, I thank Lim Chee and Nijat for representing ASPS at this event and their reports for Phytogen. Those interested in participating in Science Meets Parliament 12-13 February 2025 should contact a member of the ASPS Executive.

It has been a pleasure to be ASPS President these last two years. The enthusiasm of the membership, as evidenced by the engagement of ASPS discipline representatives and committees and the number of registrants across all career stages for ASPS 2024, indicates a strong Society. I will step down as President of the Society at the end of the year, handing over to President-Elect Brent Kaiser; however, I will continue to welcome suggestions on how to make the Society even more engaging, inclusive, and visible. Please let me know your ideas!

I wish to thank the other members of the Executive, Honorary Secretary Kim Johnson and Honorary Treasurer Mark Waters. Thank you both for your unfailing support of the Society, our open discussions, the laughs, and your can-do attitudes. It has been a pleasure.

I commend the Report to the meeting.

Prof Martha Ludwig (President ASPS)