

Neuchâtel, July 2001

A vibrant springtime start

The official inauguration meeting of the new National Centre of Competence in Research "Plant survival in Natural and Agricultural Ecosystems" took place at Neuchâtel on the 5th of April. Very much like in nature, springtime gave the management and coordination unit (MCU) the necessary drive to give the new network its shape and organise a good start.

Our open positions, advertised online (on our website and on 'Telejob') and by classical means (in Nature), received world-wide attention.

Our website is accessible since April and is updated weekly. Preparations for the new graduate school are well under way, and with the new fall semester the first courses will be organised.

Now, just before the end of the spring semester, we offer you a quick overview of what has happened during these first one hundred days.

More than 100 applications

In reaction to our job advertisements the MCU has received more than 100 applications from all over the world.

Coming from Australia, USA, India, Japan and Morocco, not to forget of course, Europe, the applications varied both in their diversity and quality. Applications from e.g. biologists, geologists and chemists reflected the range of our projects. We could also easily classify the applications among the three fields of our activities (plant physiology, ecology and applied projects).

The application deadline was set for the end of May. Counting all categories, we have 39 positions to be filled.

The NCCR newsletter of this fall

We aim to release a project newsletter four times a year. The letter will inform participants, partners and sponsors about research progress and news within the NCCR.

Each issue will have a section "spotlight" highlighting a certain scientific result or another event, which has become important since the last issue.

The "lab news" section will report about individual lab activities (mobility exchanges, research trips, visits, congress participations, talks etc.). We count on the Heads of individual projects for keeping us up to date about their lab news, including newly employed persons and won awards. In the section for the graduate school all the details about courses offered will be published.

The newsletter will also offer project partners and sponsors a communication platform, perhaps via interviews or specific portraits. You will also find a schedule of the general project meetings in the newsletter.

Website

Our website www.unine.ch/nccr/ contains already a good deal of information about the project. There you will find the objectives of our NCCR, our statute, a list of all 12 individual projects and job opportunities (PhDs, postdocs and technicians). You will also find information about some advanced courses in biology, organised within the framework of the *3e Cycle romand en sciences biologiques*.

We will make efforts to design the site as welcoming as possible, add more pictures and include a french version of the site.

Graduate school

A first course entitled "*Exploitation of plant defence chemistry by insects*" will take place at Neuchâtel from the 10th to the 12th of September 2001 (information: Ted.Turlings@unine.ch). This event is organised jointly with the 3^e Cycle romand en sciences biologiques. We take this opportunity to remind you that all PhDs and postdocs employed by the NCCR have to devote time to follow courses organised or accepted by the NCCR Graduate School.

"Research techniques" will be one of the themes to start with in the Graduate School. Through courses and workshops, given by highly qualified researchers, the participating people will have the opportunity to make themselves familiar with new techniques. We will also offer courses in experimental methodology, which, among others, will give an introduction to statistical methods.

Courses will also be open to non-members of the Graduate School, members of the school, however, will have priority when filling the available places. For the latest information about the rules and regulations of the Graduate School, visit our website.

Assembly of NCCR Participants

The first "Assembly of NCCR Participants" took place at Neuchâtel on May 31st. 22 project participants engaged into a vivid exchange with the members of the individual project "*Statistical and dynamic modelling of plant survival in ecosystems*".

The organisation of the assembly was much liked by the participants. After four presentations about the possibilities of statistics and modelling techniques there was the opportunity to discuss individual problems and ask questions to each of the members of project (Anthony Davison, Louis-Félix Bersier, François Gillet, Jean-Pierre Müller).

One goal of the afternoon was to give some ideas in which way models could be useful for various research questions related to the NCCR project. Existing work from Pierre-Joseph Charmillot (Changins) on the epidemiology of a vine pest, or work from Otto Wildi (Birmensdorf) about the impact of deer on the structure of pasture woodlands in Grisons are two examples showing a possible interaction between biologists and modelling specialists.

Such meetings will be organised six times per year.