

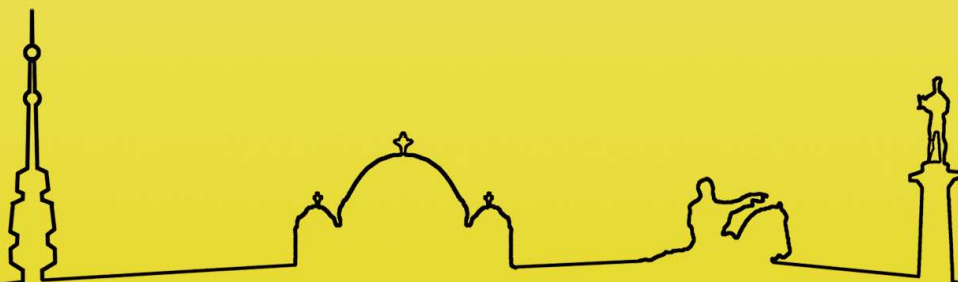
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Abstract Book



- AGAINST EUROPEAN FOULBROOD?**
Ory, Florine
- 98 **DWV-A PRESENCE IN WILD VS. MANAGED BEES FROM POLAND**
Gajda, Anna
- 99 **OVERCOMING CHALLENGES IN MEASURING BROOD RELATED VARROA RESISTANCE TRAITS BY COLONY-LEVEL PHENOTYPING OF MEAN VARROA REPRODUCTION RATE**
Lefebvre, Regis
- 100 **DEFORMED WING VIRUS GENOTYPE B IS SPREADING ACROSS THE WORLD AND POTENTIALLY REPLACING GENOTYPE A**
Paxton, Robert
- 101 **EFFECTS OF THE NEW VARROACIDAL COMPOUND LITHIUM CHLORIDE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HONEY BEE BROOD**
Rein, Carolin
- 102 **IMPACT OF AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEMES ON PATHOGEN PREVALENCE AND SPILLOVER AMONG MANAGED AND WILD BEES**
Pluta, Patrycja
- 103 **MULTIPLE EFFECTS OF LITHIUM CITRATE SYSTEMICALLY AND TOPICALLY APPLIED ON HONEY BEE COLONIES**
Stevanovic Jevrosima
- 104 **PATHOGENS AFFECT WING MORPHOLOGY IN *APIS MELLIFERA* (L.) WORKERS**
Tafi, Elena
- 105 **ACQUISITION AND PREVALENCE OF RNA VIRUSES IN NEWLY FIELD-EXPOSED BUMBLE BEES: A VIROME EXAMINATION**
Yañez, Orlando
- 106 **REDUCED PARASITE BURDEN IN FERAL HONEYBEE COLONIES**
Kohl, Patrick L.
- 107 **A NEW FRONTIER FOR VISUALIZING THE IMPACT OF STRESSORS IN BEES: PROTEINS PICTURED BY MASS SPECTROMETRY**
Bulet, Philippe
- 108 **SISTERS FROM ANOTHER FATHER – CAN HONEY BEE INTRA-COLONIAL DIVERSITY BUFFER THE IMPACT OF DISEASES?**
Beaurepaire, Alexis
- 109 **EXPLORING THE CLIMATIC DRIVERS OF HONEY BEE COLONY AND DISEASE DEVELOPMENT**
Rowland, Ben
- 110 **VIRAL GENETIC LANDSCAPE IN THE HONEY BEE POPULATIONS OF THE AZORES ARCHIPELAGO**
Lopes, Ana R.
- 111 **HONEYBEE VIRUSES AND WHERE TO FIND THEM ACROSS THE PHYLOGENETIC TREE OF BEES**
Tehel, Anja
- 112 **AMERICAN FOULBROOD RISK ASSESSMENT ANTIMICROBIAL AND RESISTANCE: PARADIGM SHIFT FROM AN INDIVIDUAL HIVE TO A “HERD HEALTH MONITORING” IN SASKATCHEWAN, CANADA**
Zabrodski, Michael
- POSTERS**
- 114 **HEALTH SCREENING OF LOCAL BEE BREEDS IN TÜRKIYE**
Dilek Muz
- 115 **NO EFFECT OF TEMPERATURE ON THE PERFORMANCE OF TRICKLING BY OXALIC ACID**
Garrido, Claudia
- 116 **MOLECULAR IDENTIFICATION OF *LOTMARIA PASSIM* IN SELECTED BUMBLEBEE SPECIES**
Michalczyk, M
- 117 **THE USE OF ENCAPSULATED ESSENTIAL OILS AGAINST VARROA AND NOSEMA**
Charistos Leonidas

- 118 **EPIDEMIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF HONEY BEE PATHOGENS IN EMILIA-ROMAGNA, ITALY**
Cilia, Giovanni
- 119 **QUANTITATIVE VIRUS DYNAMICS IN *APIS MELLIFERA* UNICOLOR COLONIES AFTER A NEW INVASION OF *VARROA DESTRUCTOR* IN LA RÉUNION ISLAND**
Benoit Jobart
- 120 **PHENOLOGY OF THE MICROSPORIDIA *NOSEMA CERANAE* IN FOUR MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES**
Martín-Hernández, Raquel
- 121 **DIRECT AND SENSITIVE DETECTION OF DEFORMED WING VIRUS USING LOOP-MEDIATED ISOTHERMAL AMPLIFICATION (LAMP) IN HONEY BEES**
De Smet, Lina
- 122 **TRYPANOSOMATIDS IN THE AZORES**
Aguado-López, Daniel
- 124 **COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT DNA EXTRACTION METHODS FOR THE STUDY OF PATHOGENS AND INTESTINAL BACTERIA IN HONEYBEES**
Aguado-López, Daniel
- 125 **CONTROL OF WAX MOTH BY MEANS OF ORGANIC**
Charrière Jean-Daniel
- 126 **IS THE BEEWOLF, *PHILANTHUS TRIANGULUM*, A NEW THREAT TO HONEY BEES ON THE CANARY ISLANDS?**
De la Rúa, Pilar
- 127 **PROTEIN-BASED DIAGNOSTIC TOOL FOR DETECTION OF AMERICAN FOULBROOD AND THE DISTINCTION OF THE TWO MAIN GENOTYPES OF *PAENIBACILLUS* LARVAE**
Ehrenberg, Sandra
- 128 **TEMPORAL ANALYSIS OF THE PREVALENCE OF *LOTMARIA PASSIM* AND *APICYSTIS BOMBI* IN HONEY BEE COLONIES ON THE CANARY ISLANDS (SPAIN)**
De la Rúa, Pilar
- 129 **THE PRESENCE OF THE FLIES (DIPTERA) IN HONEY BEE COLONIES KEPT IN LOG HIVES IN POLAND**
Molasy, Bartłomiej
- 130 **NANOFIBROUS MATRICES CONTAINING HOP LEAVES EXTRACTS FOR THE CONTROL OF AMERICAN FOULBROOD**
Giménez Martínez, Pablo D.
- 131 **STUDIES ON CHRONIC BEE PARALYSIS: AN EMERGING DISEASE OF THE HONEY BEE**
Budge, Giles
- 132 **INTERACTIONS BETWEEN PREVALENT PATHOGENS OF HONEYBEES (*APIS MELLIFERA*)**
Martín-Hernández, Raquel
- 133 **FORMULATIONS OF OXALIC ACID AGAINST *VARROA DESTRUCTOR* (DOSAGE, EFFICACY, DECOMPOSITION, RESIDUES)**
Kanelis, Dimitrios
- 134 **CRUDE EXTRACTS OF THE FUNGUS *TALAROMYCES* SP. EXHIBIT ANTIVIRAL ACTIVITY AND IMPROVE THE SURVIVAL OF CHRONIC BEE PARALYSIS VIRUS INFECTED HONEY BEES**
Vocadlova, Katerina
- 135 **COULD BUTTERFLIES SPREAD BEE VIRUSES?**
Pislak Ocepek, Metka
- 136 **DIAGNOSTIC VALUE OF THE MOLECULAR DETECTION AND QUANTIFICATION OF *PAENIBACILLUS* LARVAE SPORES IN HIVE DEBRIS SAMPLES**
Pislak Ocepek, Metka
- 137 **INVESTIGATING THE VARIATION IN SUSCEPTIBILITY OF HONEY BEES TO CHRONIC BEE PARALYSIS VIRUS**
Commandeur, Theodora
- 138 **DNA VIRUSES OF HONEY BEE**
Kadlečková, Dominika

- 139 **RELIABILITY OF MORPHOLOGICAL AND PCR METHODS FOR THE OFFICIAL DIAGNOSIS OF *AETHINA TUMIDA* (COLEOPTERA: NITIDULIDAE): A EUROPEAN INTER-LABORATORY COMPARISON**
Franco, Stéphanie
- 140 **A SURVEY OF IMPORTANT HONEY BEE VIRUSES IN THE AZORES ARCHIPELAGO**
Lopes, Ana R.
- 141 **SPATIO-TEMPORAL PATTERNS OF NOSEMA CERANAE IN THE AZORES ARCHIPELAGO**
Lopes, Ana R.
- 142 **DYNAMICS IN VERTICAL TRANSMISSION OF VIRUSES IN NATURALLY SELECTED AND TRADITIONALLY MANAGED HONEY BEE COLONIES ACROSS EUROPE**
Claeys Bouuaert, David
- 143 **DEVELOPING AN AFFORDABLE WHOLE GENOME SEQUENCING PIPELINE TO STUDY OUTBREAKS OF EUROPEAN FOULBROOD**
Pufal, Hollie
- 144 **GENETIC STRUCTURE OF *VARROA DESTRUCTOR* POPULATIONS WITH DIFFERENT PYRETHROID RESISTANCE**
De la Rúa, Pilar
- 145 **MOLECULAR GENOTYPING OF *PAENIBACILLUS* LARVAE STRAINS FROM FRANCE**
Louise, Petit
- 146 **ANTIMICROBIAL DISK SUSCEPTIBILITY TESTING OF *PAENIBACILLUS* LARVAE ISOLATES FROM BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA FOR ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE STATUS UNDER ONE HEALTH APPROACH**
Santrac Violeta
- 147 **BEE PATHOGEN PREVALENCE ACROSS A GRADIENT OF PLANT DIVERSITY**
Buydens, Louella
- 148 **STRIPS WITH OXALIC ACID AND GLYCERINE: IS IT A RELIABLE WAY OF *VARROA* TREATMENT?**
Daníhlík, Jiří
- 149 **BEE VIRUSES IN *VESPA VELUTINA***
Rodríguez-Flores, María Shantal
- 150 **INVESTIGATION OF SOME VIRUS DYNAMICS IN LOCAL BREED COLONIES BASED ON “*APIS MELLIFERA LIGUSTICA*” QUEENS ORIGINATED FROM ITALY AND “*APIS MELLIFERA ANATOLIACA*” QUEENS ORIGINATED FROM TÜRKIYE, APIARY IN THE “EAST THRACE OF TÜRKIYE”**
Dilek Muz

IMMUNITY 15**ORAL PRESENTATIONS**

- 152 **NITRIC OXIDE IS A KEY SIGNALING MOLECULE FOR ANTIMICROBIAL PEPTIDE PRODUCTION IN *APIS MELLIFERA***
Petřivalský, Marek
- 153 **HUMORAL IMMUNE RESPONSE TO SELECTED PORPHYRINS IN *APIS MELLIFERA* HONEYBEES**
Trytek, Mariusz
- 154 **WINTER HONEY BEE (*APIS MELLIFERA*) POPULATIONS SHOW GREATER POTENTIAL TO INDUCE IMMUNE RESPONSES THAN SUMMER POPULATIONS AFTER IMMUNE STIMULI**
Dostálková, Silvie

POSTERS

- 156 **OXIDATIVE STRESS ASSOCIATED WITH *VARROA* PARASITISM: EVALUATION OF LIPID PEROXIDATION IN INFESTED BEES**
Pindřáková, Eliška
- 157 **MODELING OF SEASONAL IMMUNE DYNAMICS OF HONEY BEES IN RESPONSE TO INJURY AND INJECTION OF HEAT-KILLED *SERRATIA MARCESCENS***
Hurychová, Jana

A SURVEY OF IMPORTANT HONEY BEE VIRUSES IN THE AZORES ARCHIPELAGO

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The Azores archipelago is an interesting place to study honey bee viruses and their associations with *Varroa destructor*, given that there are islands with (Pico, Flores, and Faial) and without the mite. With the goal of establishing a baseline for future viruses studies, here we sampled 494 colonies distributed across eight islands, in the summers of 2014/2015 and 2020. These samples were screened for the most important honey bee viruses (BQCV, CBPV, SBV, BeeMLV, and the LSV-, DWV-, and AKI-complexes) and the viral loads were determined by RT-qPCR for the positive samples. Of the seven viruses, only BeeMLV and the AKI-complex were not detected. The BQCV was found on all the islands with a high prevalence (>79%) with a wide range of viral loads. São Miguel showed the lowest median BQCV loads (3.18×10^2 copies/ μ L) and Terceira the highest (6.19×10^3 copies/ μ L). In the 2020 sampling, the BQCV loads showed a significant increase on São Jorge and Santa Maria. The LSV was also found on all the islands. Notably, the LSV prevalence increased significantly in 2020, but not the viral loads. Only Faial and Pico (both with varroa) had SBV, but there was no statistical difference in viral loads between the two islands. CBPV was detected on Pico, São Miguel, Graciosa, Terceira, and Faial, but only in a few colonies (5.3%), although with high viral loads. DWV was never found on São Jorge and Terceira in either sampling period. With the exception of Faial, DWV prevalence was higher on the islands with varroa (Pico and Flores) than on the varroa-free islands. The viral loads were not statistically different between islands with and without varroa for any of the viruses, suggesting that varroa is not the only factor contributing to infection. This study suggests that, in addition to varroa- and *Nosema ceranae*-free honey bee populations, some of the islands seem to harbor populations that are also free of some important viruses like DWV, CBPV, SBV, BeeMLV and AKI-complex.

Keywords: viruses, real-time qPCR, prevalence