



Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends, Dear Readers,

It was a great honour for me, as President of the European Weed Research Society, to welcome the participants to the 20th EWRS Symposium.

This edition held special significance - not only did it mark the 20th Symposium, but it also celebrated the 50th anniversary of our Society's founding. With over 300 participants and an impressive number of submitted abstracts, I can confidently say the event was a great success, reaffirming that weed science research is thriving!

First, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to making this event possible. Its success is a direct result of their dedication and tireless efforts.

Special thanks go to our Scientific Secretary, Husrev Mennan, who has overseen all scientific aspects of the symposium—from coordinating abstract reviews and shaping the scientific programme to providing essential support throughout the process. He was ably supported by our Vice-President, Ilias Travlos.

I also extend my sincere appreciation to the Session Organizers, who played a vital role in reviewing and assigning the large volume of abstracts, ensuring each was placed in the most appropriate session and contributing significantly to the scientific quality of the programme.

I also wish to thank our Treasurer, who has managed the complex financial aspects of the event, supporting the local organizers, students, the Board, and the Society as a whole.

The Communication Team, in close collaboration with Lena Ulber, the EWRS Secretary, the Local Organizers, the Event Manager, and the Board, did an excellent job keeping everyone informed and engaged with timely updates and news. Their work during the event - taking pictures, conducting interviews, and publishing real-time updates – was equally commendable.

A very special mention goes to Prof. Jordi Recasens, the Local Organizers, and his exceptional team. The success of the symposium was largely due to their unwavering commitment. With the support of the University of Lleida, the Fundació Universitat de Lleida, and Agrotecnio, they meticulously planned every detail—from excursions and the gala dinner to lunches, coffee breaks, poster sessions, and meeting rooms—ensuring a smooth and enjoyable experience for all.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to our sponsors, whose support has been essential to the success of this event. I also extend my heartfelt thanks to the EWRS for its continued support of young researchers, students, and the Board in participating in this important gathering.

Let me emphasize—though many of you may already know—that all active members of the EWRS, including the event organizers and the President, contributed their time and efforts entirely on a voluntary basis, with the exception of a few essential external services. I warmly encourage young researchers and students to become more actively involved in the life of the Society—we need fresh energies. The upcoming elections for some positions within the Society offer a valuable opportunity to contribute!

The symposium programme was particularly rich, both scientifically and socially. With 18 sessions, over 100 oral presentations - a deliberate choice to give as many researchers as possible the opportunity to share their work - and more than 200 posters presented across four dedicated sessions, this edition featured one of the most comprehensive scientific programmes in EWRS history.

Several important scientific side events enriched the experience, including the opening and closing ceremonies, Working Group meetings, the General Assembly, the Students' Welcome, and the Prize-Winner Ceremony. We were also honoured to host three outstanding invited speakers, whose contributions added significant value to the programme.

The social programme was equally engaging, featuring a welcome party, excursions, the visit to the old cathedral, the 'Castellers' exhibition, and the gala dinner - all perfectly organized and integrated into the overall schedule, ensuring that participants remained engaged and entertained throughout.

During the closing ceremony, we were pleased to announce the venue for the next symposium: the 21st EWRS Symposium will take place in Uppsala, Sweden, in 2027, organized by Prof. Alexander Menegat and his local team. On the behalf of the EWRS, I extend my sincere thanks to Prof. Menegat for stepping forward, and I wish him success in organizing the future event. Please start planning your participation.

In recent years, our field experienced a gradual decline in attention from stakeholders, the public, agrochemical companies, and even academic and research institutions. This trend is reflected in our membership: from over 800 members during our "golden years," we now maintain a steady base of around 400.

Yet the importance of weeds—and the need to manage them—has not diminished. On the contrary, it has become more urgent than ever, not only in agriculture but also in natural ecosystems, urban areas, and archaeological sites. The growing demand for sustainable farming, the rise of organic and agroecological systems, the banning of certain herbicides, and the lack of new active ingredients all underscore the need for effective and environmentally responsible weed management strategies.

Climate change, the rapid movement of goods and people, the introduction of new crops, and global events reshaping trade dynamics are further accelerating the spread of invasive plant species, adding complexity to our work.

At the same time, we are witnessing a profound transformation in the focus and methods of weed research. Where once the goal was to "know the enemy and destroy it," primarily through chemical or mechanical means, today we are embracing a new paradigm—one that seeks to understand weeds holistically and manage them sustainably. Advances in genetics, plant physiology, modeling, robotics, artificial intelligence, and chemistry, combined with a growing commitment to environmental stewardship, are opening innovative and previously unimaginable avenues.

The EWRS has the potential to serve as a hub and catalyst for cutting-edge research in our field. This symposium clearly demonstrated that potential, as evidenced by the impressive number of submitted abstracts, many of which explored novel and advanced areas of study.

EWRS is currently undertaking several initiatives to foster greater member participation, enhance the involvement of young scientists, reorganize thematic Working Groups, and ensure a healthy turnover in leadership roles. Specifically, we plan to:  
Launch a series of webinars covering both specialized and general-interest topics.

Continue supporting Travel Grants for Bilateral Cooperation, offering scholarships to support international research visits for young researchers.

Increase our media presence through more targeted and widespread communication efforts, including interviews, blogs, and more frequent updates.

Optimize the Society's management costs to ensure long-term sustainability.

Regarding our journal, Weed Research—which remains the primary source of income for EWRS—its long-term stability depends on maintaining and improving its quality.

This means encouraging the submission of more high-quality articles. The publisher is implementing Research Exchange, a new article management system expected to streamline the submission and review process. The transition to this platform is scheduled for mid-August. The journal will continue to operate under a hybrid model, publishing both Open Access (OA) and Article Processing Charge (APC) articles, with a gradual shift toward full Open Access.

We are also working on launching at least one special issue linked to the Symposium, as many of you have expressed interest in submitting articles following the event. A second special issue will focus on neutral weed communities, and more will be regularly launched in the future, supported by offered or invited volunteer subject editors.

To conclude, I must say that the only sad note of the entire event was the absence of researchers from certain countries, who were unable to attend due to ongoing conflicts and wars. Their absence was deeply felt and reminds us of the difficult circumstances that many of our colleagues face around the world.

In this time of wars, social unrest, and the troubling resurgence of nationalism and fascist ideologies, I believe it is crucial that our Society—EWRS—and, indeed, all scientific communities, serve as examples of human collaboration and harmony. Our work must transcend all forms of discrimination—whether based on gender, nationality, social status, or skin colour—and be grounded in mutual support, complete trust, and a shared commitment to advancing global knowledge. From personal experience, I can affirm that all active members of EWRS truly embody and believe in these values. The lack of participation of researchers from some countries, due to ongoing wars, is the only sad note of the whole event

Thus, I wish you all the best for the future and hope you are enjoying - have already enjoyed, or will soon enjoy a pleasant, fruitful and relaxing summer holiday.

Thank you for your attention.

Maurizio Vurro

16th July 2025