MarBEF Theme 2: Marine Biodiversity and Ecosystem Functioning

MANUELA in Brazil

A report from the 13th International Meiofauna Conference (Thirimco)

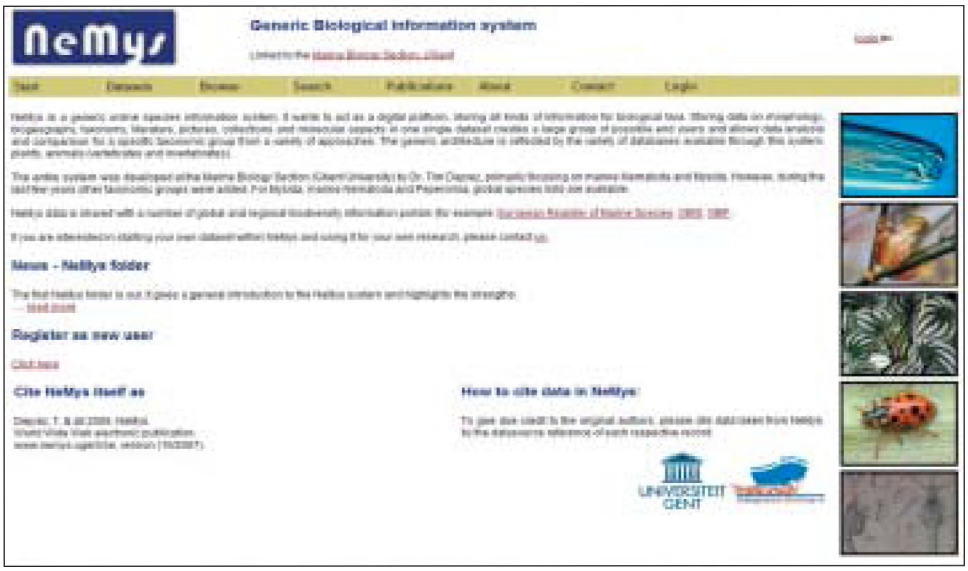
Participants from the MarBEF MANUELA project in Brazil in August.

By Jan Vanaverbeke

Last August, many meiobenthologists from all over the world met at their tri-annual scientific meeting in Recife, Brazil. This conference lasted for five days and consisted of 63 presentations, seven discussion sessions and more than 100 posters. Financial support by MarBEF allowed participants from the RMP **MANUELA** to organise our own MarBEF MANUELA session during Thirimco. Since this conference is the most important conference worldwide for meiobenthologists, the organisation of this session greatly increased the visibility of MarBEF in general and, in particular, MANUELA, outside of Europe.

The MarBEF MANUELA session comprised nine talks and was chaired by Jan Vanaverbeke, principal investigator of MANUELA. In the first presentation, MarBEF and MANUELA were introduced by Magda Vincx. Special attention was given here to the philosophy of MarBEF: "Integrating and sharing experiences will lead to better science!"

Two talks dealt with the results of the first years of activity within MANUELA. The development of the integrated nematode taxonomical archive and identification key for marine nematodes within NeMys (see http://nemys.ugent.be) was demonstrated. This was especially important for the MANUELA project, since stimulating research on meiofauna inside and outside Europe was a major aim of MANUELA. The creation of this key was a big step forward in reaching this goal and our current number of users proves that we were successful in doing so.



A second major MANUELA product consists of the integrated database. Both the advantages of data compilation and sharing were explained and the contents of the database were presented. So far, the MANUELA database is based upon 82 individual datasets and contains information on more then 140,000 distribution records from approximately 1,500 sampling stations. As such, this is the largest and most complete database on meiofauna ever compiled. Therefore it provides European scientists with an ideal tool to test hypotheses on a large geographical scale.

Based on this database, we were able to test and adjust some of the long-standing hypotheses (concerning disturbance, depth-size relationships and depth–diversity relationships) in meiofaunal science which were communicated in the subsequent talks. In addition, the first results from a biogeographical analysis on harpacticoid copepods and the modelling of nematode diversity were presented.

The contribution of MANUELA scientists to Thirimco was not limited to the MarBEF MANUELA session alone. Twenty-nine of the 63 presentations were authored or co-authored by scientists active in MANUELA. Besides this, four MANUELA scientists chaired one of the sessions. This shows that MANUELA and scientists active in MANUELA are at a leading position in the field of meiobenthology, not only in Europe but on the global scale.

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