

## Recently Awarded

► For his contributions to genetics in the last 15 years, **Detlef Weigel** (MPI for Developmental Biology, Tübingen) has been awarded the **2016 GSA Medal** from the Genetics Society of America. Praised for his “deep rooted understanding of genetics and his technological creativity”, Weigel has greatly advanced the knowledge of plant flowering, the prize committee said. His studies revealed, for instance, early events in flower development, the molecular basis for floral patterns and mechanisms for natural flowering time.

► Her “boundless energy and enthusiasm” not only made **Fiona Watt** (King’s College London) one of Europe’s top stem cell experts, it also earned her a very special recognition, the **2016 FEBS I EMBO Women in Science Award**. Throughout her career, Watt has discovered more and more clues to unravel the mechanisms that control stem cell behaviour. What role do intrinsic (epigenetics) and extrinsic (physical forces) factors play in the regulation of cell fate decisions? To find answers to this question, Watt and her group relies on mammalian (mouse or human) skin as a model system. The award comes with prize money of €10,000.

► Two European researchers are among the winners of this year’s **Protein Society Awards**. **Andreas Plückthun** (University of Zürich) won the Christian B. Anfinsen Award that recognises technological advancements in protein research and **Jane Clarke** (University of Cambridge) was honoured with the Stein and Moore Award, given to protein scientists who consistently make valuable contributions to the field. Regarded as a pioneer in protein engineering, Plückthun developed methods to create new proteins and protein variants. One of his achievements is the engineering of Designed Ankyrin Repeat Proteins or DARPs, novel scaffolds for selective protein binding. Clarke uses a multidisciplinary approach to study protein folding, misfolding and assembly. -KG-

### Microbial map of the mouth

## Spit it Out!

When children stick out their tongue, parents tell them to stop and behave. But scientists at the Centre for Genomic Regulation in Barcelona encourage that behaviour. Their Saca la Lengua or Stick out your Tongue project is meant to not only “study the mouth’s microbiome and its possible relationship with our environmental characteristics and lifestyle”, it is also aimed at bringing life sciences, and in particular bioinformatics, closer to young people, inspiring the next generation of researchers and scientists.

“We’re very happy with the experience and with meeting the challenge of a citizen science project in biomedicine. We have involved society in most phases of the project: from the establishment of initial hypotheses to the bioinformatic and statistical analysis, including the collection of samples,” said Luis Serrano, director of the CRG.



Photo: www.publicdomainpictures.net/ Piotr Siedlecki

At the heart of the project, launched a year ago, is the microbial analysis of more than 1,000 saliva samples from high school students from all over Spain. Besides the saliva sample, the study set-up also included a questionnaire with more than 50 questions about the student’s eating and drinking habits, for instance. CRG researcher Luis Bejarano insisted on collecting the samples himself. Travelling over 7,000 km, with his hand centrifuge and a battery-powered freezer, he thinks it was a very good idea to involve the public. “For example, in some villages, students asked us what they should write in the questionnaire if they drink water from a well – we hadn’t even thought about that!”

The carefully collected and analysed samples allowed the scientists to draw up a “high-resolution, oral microbiome pro-

file of the young Spanish population”. Further analysis, which is still in the preliminary phase, revealed some interesting differences, depending on where in Spain the students live, what type of water they drink, whether they smoke, or whether they share their home with a pet. Ultimately, the knowledge gained through this project could be used to come up with ideas for better oral health.

As is right and proper, students and other participants, who have significantly contributed to the project, will become co-authors of future publications. “It was a perfect combination of ‘boot’ and ‘lab coat’ biology, which often seem so remote from one another,” Bejarano concludes.

### EMBO grant withdrawn

## Cash Return

Once again, PubPeer eyes have seen double. Duplicated images to be exact, in a *Nature Genetics* paper by Portuguese researcher Sonia Melo *et al.* The post-publication peer review platform is famous for revealing violations of Good Scientific Practice; it was them, who got the ball rolling, causing plant biologist Olivier Voinnet to stumble and ultimately, fall.

Now, also Sonia Melo’s career is on shaky ground. In late January, *Nature Genetics* retracted her paper, co-authored by cancer expert Manel Esteller, “for the sake of the high standards we expect for research and scientific journals”. All authors agreed to the retraction. The juicy bit? With this paper on the reference list, Melo had applied for an EMBO Installation Grant. She won the grant, which would have given her an annual award of €50,000 for up to five years and access to EMBL core facilities, as well as ample opportunity to set up a network of collaborators.

Needless to say, EMBO immediately started an investigation into Melo’s case. On *Retraction Watch*, the Portuguese researcher explained how the duplicated images ended up in the now retracted paper: “The first version of the submitted manuscript shows that the figures were accurate without the duplication that appeared in the final version. The published correction (2010) to the manuscript happened because one of these mistakes was identified soon after the original publication. At that time point this was taken as an isolated error, which happened during final figure assembly of the images. Unfortunately, I failed to see the other duplicated image- ►►