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Preface

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Introduction Special Issue on Oligochaeta

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The Oligochaeta is composed of the mostly aquatic microdriles and the mostly terrestrial megadriles, better known as earthworms. These terrestrial megadriles, a diverse group (around 6500 described species), is one of the most ecologically important in their respective habitats.

This Special Issue on Oligochaeta is particularly dedicated to three earthworm ecologists and taxonomists: **Victor V. Pop**, **Alexander Feijoó** and **Pietro Omodeo**, as well as is associated with contributions to the **IX International Oligochaeta Taxonomy Meeting**, held in El Escorial, Spain on December 11th to 15th 2023.

The main goal of the International Oligochaeta Taxonomy Meetings (IOTM) is to bring together experts in the field to exchange advances and to identify the current gaps in the knowledge of these important but poorly known animals, and to stimulate synergies, collaboration and the exchange of ideas. The focus of these meetings is on oligochaete taxonomy and phylogeny, but other aspects of their biology are integrated as well as ecology, faunistic, phylogeography and evolutionary biology.

Victor V. Pop had a strong presence in the vermicologist community. He was among the participants at the first IOTM in Madrid, Spain (2003). He co-organised the second IOTM held in Romania (2005) and participated in the following editions in Cyprus (2007), Turkey (2009) and Switzerland (2011) as well. He will always be remembered for his vast knowledge of lumbricid taxonomy and ecology, as well as his cheerful disposition and distinctive smile (Csuzdi & Sherlock, this issue).

Alexander Feijoó was a self-taught taxonomist and also an avid reader and corresponded with many other taxonomists. He was known as a fervent supporter of the finding of soil biodiversity, especially in the neotropics, sustainable soil use, and traditional knowledge of soils and associated fauna (Brown *et al.*, this issue).

Pietro Omodeo has been characterized as a Renaissance man who was honest and forward-thinking, an all-around scholar, one of the last of a golden generation of scientists, and a source of pride for Italian research (Rota, this issue).

A memorial to each of these significant scientists who have passed away from the oligochaetofauna community is included in this special edition. It chronicles their paths and achievements to academics, science, and society at large.

This Special Issue is the 4th edition on the Global Diversity of Earthworms and other Oligochaetes (Schmelz 2012; 2018; Bartz *et al.*, 2023) which proposed contributions to the knowledge on taxonomy, systematics and distribution of the group, in an effort to instigate, to promote and to improve the submission of papers on the Oligochaeta (Megadrili) taxa in *Zootaxa* including: theories and methods of systematics and phylogeny, taxonomic monographs, revisions and reviews, catalogues/checklists, biographies and bibliographies, identification guides, analysis of characters, phylogenetic relationships and zoogeographical patterns of distribution, descriptions of taxa, and nomenclature.

This Special Issue has a total of 26 manuscripts from at least 14 countries on three continents (Asia, Europe and the Americas) and they are organized by continent. Europe (nine) and Asia (eight) have a greater number of

contributions. We have three manuscripts in honor to earthworm taxonomists and ecologists, who passed away 2022, 2023 and 2024. The description of new species comprises nine manuscripts plus seven integrative taxonomy and/or molecular and/or record and/or biogeography manuscripts. A total of 40 new species are presented in this Special Issue. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the number of integrative studies has increased, indicating a significant tendency for further research using this approach. Other four manuscripts are records of species for different places and/or regions around the globe. And finally, three more manuscripts are checklists of countries and regions (Nepal and Dominican Republic and the Alpine-Carpathian-Balkanic region), one biogeography manuscript from India and one molecular manuscript for the species *Octolasion lacteum* on a world level.

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