

Speech for Arenberg Prize Award Ceremony 2015

Benjamin van Soldt

It is a great honor for me to be here today to receive the Arenberg Prize 2015, and I am thankful towards the committee of the Coimbra Group and in particular to the Duke of Arenberg for nominating me as this year's awardee of the prize.

When I finished my undergraduate thesis at Leiden University under the supervision of Profs. Richardson and Poelmann, I knew three things: that I loved to study evolutionary relations of animal anatomies, that to do this well I'd need to incorporate other dimensions, and that anyway I would never get a job doing just anatomical research. As a second dimension, I found that adding either developmental biology or physiology would be the most interesting to me, so that I carefully structured my Master: first I did a study in developmental biology at Leiden University, again under the expert supervision of Profs Richardson and Poelmann. However, studying physiology at Leiden University was impossible since there is no department for it here. I therefor made use of the opportunity Erasmus presented me with, which enabled me to work at the zoophysiology section of the department of biosciences at the University of Aarhus under the supervision of Prof Wang and Danielsen. Thus the Erasmus exchange was a seamless part of my research plan, and served a strictly defined aim: to acquire a more holistic view of evolutionary processes and research. In addition I now have an international network of scientists to collaborate with (we are seeking to continue or start some new projects). Vitally, having done research in both developmental biology and physiology, I was able to assess what I would find most interesting to specialize for a PhD so that now I'm enrolled in the Genetics PhD program at Columbia University in the City of New York. Finally, we recently submitted for review one out of two manuscripts based on my research in Aarhus.

To now receive the Arenberg Prize on the basis of this research plan and the role Erasmus played in it is a great honor for me and a huge confidence boost, and I again want to express my deepest thanks to all parties involved in the selection process.

I didn't get to this stage by my own powers alone, however, and I am deeply indebted to several people. First of all my parents, whose support and help put me on the right path early on. Secondly my supervisors, Profs Richardson and Poelmann who could join us here today, and Profs Wang and Danielsen, who sadly weren't able to come to the Netherlands today, were also instrumental in my scientific development, offering valuable direction, consultation, explanation, help, support and supervision. Finally my friends who always offered comic or serious relief. Thank you.