

## Preface

The field of symbiosis is making a dramatic passage from an interesting but peripheral topic for discussion to a mainstream central tenet of biology. Clear evidence for this are the many high quality and diverse research papers that comprise this volume. They provide insight into just some of the topics presented at the Fourth International Symbiosis Congress held in Halifax, Nova Scotia from the 16th to the 23rd August, 2003, which was attended by 250 delegates from thirty countries.

We appreciate the support of the US National Science Foundation for helping to sponsor the Congress and its follow-up, including travel support for some of the participants. To us, the converted, there is no need to be reminded about the important impacts that symbiosis has upon the formation of the very biomes within which we live. Indeed, symbiosis contributes greatly to the biodiversity of the planet, appears fundamental to understanding evolutionary processes, and influences ecology, medicine, cell research, environmental protection, and agriculture in profound ways. The 4-ISS Congress helped to deepen our understanding and commitment to this growing field.

As members of the International Symbiosis Society, and as subscribers to the *SYMBIOSIS* journal, we have a vehicle, a voice, through which our research visions, findings, ideas and theories can be promoted. Through the Society, we can help focus attention on the whole field of symbiosis which should lead to the greater success of symbiosis-related grant proposals, and to enhanced awareness in the general and scientific community. Our international citizenry needs to appreciate that life survived and thrived on our ancient planet earth via strategies which involved symbiosis including mergers and the integration of very different types of organisms.

This special volume of *SYMBIOSIS* clearly demonstrates the need for greater connections between researchers in different areas of the discipline. We believe that this collection of fascinating papers, peer-reviewed and selected from the latest international symbiosis gathering, will serve as a strong nutrient base that will stimulate further study and a healthy blossoming of the symbiosis field over the coming years.

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