

Presentation of the Acharius Medal to Professor Eva Barreno

Dear colleagues and friends,

It is a great honour to be here with you today to present one of the highest distinctions in our discipline: the **Acharius Medal awardee**.

This medal recognizes not only scientific excellence, but also a lifetime devoted to advancing lichenology, shaping our scientific community, and inspiring future generations. Today we celebrate someone whose career embodies all of these ideals.

Her scientific journey began more than fifty years ago as a botanist fascinated by lichens and ecosystems. From the very beginning, she refused to be confined by disciplinary boundaries. Starting with taxonomy, vegetation science and conservation, she went on to embrace ecophysiology, molecular biology, genomics and evolutionary biology, always driven by the same desire: to ask deeper questions and to seek broader explanations. This intellectual curiosity has defined her entire career.

Throughout these years, she has never simply followed the development of lichenology. **She has helped redefine it.**

One of her defining contributions was changing the way we think about lichen symbiosis itself. For generations, we learned that a lichen consisted of one fungus associated with one alga. Her work has contributed to demonstrate that reality is far richer.

She confirmed that several photobiont lineages can coexist within a single lichen thallus challenging the traditional view classical of lichen symbiosis and opened an entirely new field of research. Today, this concept has become part of the framework through which we understand lichen symbioses.

But the best scientists never stop after one important discovery. She continued asking deeper questions. **How do these symbionts function? How do they tolerate environmental stress? How have they evolved? How are they connected?**

These questions led her group to pioneer genomic studies of *Trebouxia*, developing unique culture collections, and establishing model systems that are now used internationally.

Across decades, she has consistently expanded our understanding of lichens—from organisms to ecosystems, from ecology to genomes, from field observations to molecular mechanisms.

Scientific excellence, however, is only one part of her legacy.

Perhaps the best way to understand her career is through the very concept she has devoted her life to studying **symbiosis**. She has not only studied symbiosis, **she has lived it**.

She has always believed that the best science emerges when different ideas, different disciplines and different people work together.

Throughout her career, she has built scientific communities in much the same way that lichens build successful symbioses: through trust, cooperation and the conviction that together we can understand far more than any of us could alone.

Yet, if you ask many of us what defines her, we will probably not begin by speaking about her remarkable publication record, the many competitive research projects she has led, or the scientific distinctions she has received—impressive as all of these are. We will speak about her mentorship.

She has an extraordinary ability to recognize potential in young scientists, often long before they recognize it themselves.

She trusts people. She gives them opportunities. She encourages independence. And she celebrates their success as if it were her own.

Many researchers who have passed through her laboratory now lead their own research groups, teach at universities, work in research institutes, or contribute to biodiversity conservation and environmental management.

They represent perhaps her greatest scientific legacy: **not only knowledge, but people**.

Like many others, I arrived in her laboratory full of curiosity and many things still to learn. There is one expression she often uses to describe herself. She says she is "**inasequible al desaliento**"—someone who is impossible to discourage.

Anyone who has worked with her knows that this is much more than a sentence. It is a philosophy. When experiments failed, when projects became difficult, or when reviewers were less enthusiastic than we hoped, giving up was simply never an option.

That resilience has become part of all of us who have had the privilege of growing scientifically alongside her.

There is another thing that everyone who has worked with her knows. Travelling with her is never just travelling. You may be driving along a country road when, without warning, she points through the car window and says, "*There is a Ramalina fraxinea on that tree.*" Your first reaction is always the same: "*No way. She couldn't possibly have seen it.*" Then you stop the car. You walk towards the tree. And of course... she was right. That extraordinary eye for lichens has amazed generations of students and colleagues.

But perhaps what many of us remember even more is something entirely different. She has always believed that science deserves to be celebrated. A new project. A published paper. A successful PhD. A research grant. For her, every achievement—large or small—is a perfect excuse to bring everyone together for lunch and drink Godello wine.

Because she has always understood that science is a collective adventure, and that every success belongs to the whole team. That is the mark of a truly exceptional mentor.

The Acharius Medal honours outstanding lifetime achievements in lichenology.

Professor Eva Barreno's career represents exactly that. Her research has transformed our understanding of lichen symbiosis. Her vision has expanded the boundaries of our discipline. Her leadership has created collaborations across continents. Her generosity has shaped generations of scientists. And her influence lives not only in her publications, but in the people she has inspired, the scientific communities she has helped build, and the new ways in which we now understand lichens.

Dear Eva,

For more than fifty years, you have shown us that lichens are far more complex than we once imagined. Perhaps, without even intending to, you have also shown us something about science itself. That the strongest discoveries, like the strongest symbioses, are built on curiosity, trust and collaboration.

Your legacy is not only the science you have produced.

It is the community you have created.

It is the generations of scientists you have inspired.

And it is the example you have given all of us of how to do science—with passion, with courage and, yes, **inasequible al desaliento**.

On behalf of the International Association for Lichenology, and on behalf of the many colleagues, students and friends whose lives you have enriched throughout your extraordinary career,

it is my great honour to invite you to receive the **Acharius Medal**.

Congratulations, Eva.

Patricia Moya, assistant prof. and researcher of the Universitat de València

On behalf of:

François Lutzoni, Duke University USA, president of the IAL

Lucia Muggia, Università di Trieste, Italy, chair of the conference IAL10