

# **Impacts of the Latin American Meetings on Oligochaete Ecology and Taxonomy (ELAETAO) on earthworm and enchytraeid research in Latin America**

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Four Latin American Meetings on Oligochaete Ecology and Taxonomy have been held since 2003: ELAETAO1 (Londrina, Brazil, Dec. 2003), ELAETAO2 (San Juan, Puerto Rico, Nov. 2005), ELAETAO3 (Curtiba, Brazil, Dec. 2007) and ELAETAO4 (Curitiba, Oct. 2010). These unique fora brought together >80 researchers, students and technicians from >12 countries and resulted in several important publications (3 special journal issues and one book), helping to synthesize the work performed in the Americas. Topics addressed include the diversity and distribution of native and exotic earthworm species in all Latin American countries, the use of oligochaetes as bioindicators, oligochaete genetics and phylogeny, various aspects of vermiculture, earthworm and enchytraeid sampling methods, and ecology and biology of invasive species, among others. At each ELAETAO, workshops have been held on specific topics, leading to syntheses of current knowledge and the main research challenges for the future. An interactive and synthetic web-site is presently under construction to facilitate identification of exotic earthworms and disseminate knowledge on earthworm ecology. Since the first ELAETAO, regular training in taxonomy has been offered (6 earthworm and 2 Enchytraeid short courses) aiding in the capacity building of scientists and students in the field. The ELAETAO have greatly stimulated Oligochaete ecology and taxonomy research in the Americas, but language barriers and taxonomic impediments continue to hinder the wider dissemination of Latin America Oligochaete research.