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The Nature of Light: Light in Nature II

Katherine Creath
Editor

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Contents

v	Conference Committee
vii	Introduction

SESSION 1 FUNDAMENTAL PROPERTIES OF LIGHT

- 7057 02 **Gaussian-like shaping of coherent synchrotron x-rays: 3D diffraction at a 90-degree Bragg reflection** [7057-03]
A. Y. Nikulin, Monash Univ. (Australia); A. Y. Souvorov, JASRI/SPring-8 (Japan)
- 7057 03 **Singular optical phenomena in nature (Invited Paper)** [7057-01]
G. A. Swartzlander, Jr., College of Optical Sciences, The Univ. of Arizona (United States); G. Gbur, Univ. of North Carolina at Charlotte (United States)
- 7057 04 **Experimental investigation of the singular phenomena in statistical optical fields (Invited Paper)** [7057-02]
W. Wang, Heriot-Watt Univ. (United Kingdom); M. Takeda, The Univ. of Electro-Communications (Japan)

SESSION 2 LIGHT AND BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

- 7057 05 **Product piracy from nature: biomimetic microstructures and interfaces for high-performance optics (Invited Paper)** [7057-05]
R. Brunner, A. Deparnay, M. Helgert, M. Burkhardt, Carl Zeiss AG (Germany); T. Lohmüller, J. P. Spatz, Max Planck Institute for Metals Research (Germany)
- 7057 06 **Photonic nanoarchitectures occurring in butterfly scales as selective gas/vapor sensors** [7057-06]
L. P. Biró, K. Kertész, Z. Vértessy, Research Institute for Technical Physics and Materials Science (Hungary); Zs. Bálint, Hungarian Natural History Museum (Hungary)
- 7057 07 **Biologically inspired optics: analog semiconductor model of the beetle exoskeleton** [7057-07]
K. Buhl, Z. Roth, The Univ. of North Carolina at Charlotte (United States); P. Srinivasan, College of Optics and Photonics, Univ. of Central Florida (United States); R. Rumpf, Prime Research (United States); E. Johnson, The Univ. of North Carolina at Charlotte (United States)
- 7057 08 **A look at some systemic properties of self-bioluminescent emission** [7057-08]
K. Creath, Optineering (United States) and College of Optical Sciences, The Univ. of Arizona (United States)
- 7057 09 **High Dynamic Range Image rendering of color in chameleons' camouflage using optical thin films** [7057-09]
M. Prusten, Optical Design Labs. (United States) and Silicon Arts (United States)

POSTER SESSION

- 7057 0A **Novel keys for analyzing physical features of light** [7057-10]
R. Betancur, R. Castaneda, Univ. Nacional de Colombia Sede Medellin (Colombia)
- 7057 0B **Prediction of spectral shifts proportional to source distances by time-varying frequency or wavelength selection** [7057-11]
V. Guruprasad, Inspired Research (United States)
- 7057 0C **New Doppler-free resonance in counterpropagating light waves** [7057-12]
S. A. Zibrov, Lebedev Physical Institute (Russia) and Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (Russia); L. A. Sidorenkov, P. A. Siushev, Lebedev Physical Institute (Russia); V. V. Vasil'ev, Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (Russia); V. L. Velichansky, Lebedev Physical Institute (Russia) and Moscow Engineering Physics Institute (Russia); D. V. Brazhnikov, Institute of Laser Physics (Russia); A. V. Taichenachev, A. M. Tumaikin, Institute of Laser Physics (Russia) and Novosibirsk State Univ. (Russia); V. I. Yudin, Institute of Laser Physics (Russia), Novosibirsk State Univ. (Russia), and Novosibirsk State Technical Univ. (Russia)
- 7057 0D **Photo-real rendering of bioluminescence and iridescence in creatures from the abyss** [7057-13]
M. Prusten, Optical Design Labs. (United States) and Silicon Arts (United States)

Author Index

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Introduction

In the field of optical science and engineering there are many aspects of light we take for granted; yet, do we truly understand and appreciate the nature of light in the world around us? In the natural world there are many fascinating and beautiful effects involving optics. Most of the time we take these effects for granted. Each day optical scientists and engineers discover more about the natural world when we see how new technologies such as photonic crystals mimic the natural world. Photonic crystal-like structures in peacock feathers give the plumes their color. Similar structures in butterfly wing scales provide their iridescent colors.

Beyond these structures there are effects in the natural world such as the aurora borealis or things as everyday as rainbows and oil slicks. Polarization and color effects brighten up our world. When we look more closely we notice that plants glow and self-bioluminescence provides information about the state of health of organisms. We may even wonder why it is that parrots have a visual response much further into the ultraviolet than we do.

As optical scientists and engineers, most of us became fascinated with light at some point in our lives. We observe things in our everyday life that we don't often explore or think about, yet there are researchers who spend their careers looking at these effects in nature.

This conference is the fourth in a series of conferences on *The Nature of Light*, begun in 2005 with *The Nature of Light: What is a Photon?* (SPIE vol. 5866, 2005). Other volumes in the series include *The Nature of Light: Light in Nature* (SPIE vol. 6285, 2006) and *The Nature of Light: What are Photons?* (SPIE vol. 6664, 2007).

This year's conference *The Nature of Light: Light in Nature II* is comprised of 12 papers with authors from eight different countries providing a variety of research involving light in the natural world. The papers have been split into two sessions. Session 1 focuses on *Fundamental Properties of Light* while Session 2 focuses on *Light and Biological Systems*. Each of these papers offers its own perspective and provides some insight into the nature of light.

We enjoy having the opportunity to investigate these questions in a forum uniting optical scientists and engineers from all over the world. Come join us, and remember what it was like to be a child asking the question "What is light?"

Katherine Creath