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Supervisor's evaluation of the PhD thesis of Benita C. Laird-Hopkins

The PhD thesis by Benita Laird-Hopkins provides a detailed and well-structured look at the thermoregulation of butterflies across several European and tropical sites and keen analytical skills. It combines seamlessly blending field observations and laboratory experiments. This approach allowed Benita to make conclusions about the effect of morphological traits and well as behaviour and phylogeny on the thermal abilities of butterflies across the gradient of habitats and temperatures. The thesis comprises three papers, one of which have already been well-published, showcasing Benita's commitment to disseminating her research findings. In the meantime, she is actively involved in the revision process of the other two papers. Additionally, Benita has collaborated on three other published papers during her PhD tenure, underscoring her ability to contribute meaningfully to science across a range of fields.

One of Benita's most remarkable attributes is her ability to work independently, demonstrated in both tropical and temperate settings. Her proactive approach to managing permits, paperwork, and funding for her research trips is commendable and alleviates the burden on her supervisors. Benita's capability to initiate and lead an independent research project from inception, manage a team of researchers and assistants in both temperate and tropical settings, across languages and social settings, is truly noteworthy. Above all, Benita was always a very good team player as demonstrated through the collaborative projects with Cambridge University and within my laboratory of Multitrophic Interactions.

What sets Benita apart is her resilience and adaptability. Despite joining the PhD program with me in an unconventional manner, only in May 2021, she quickly overcame challenges, redefined her research focus and secured alternative funding. Her ability to develop and complete her work within the remaining two years is a testament to her resourcefulness, securing collaborations, internships, and additional datasets along the way.

As we, supervisors, grow and learn from the students, I have personally benefited from Benita's insistence on strict deadlines, which has significantly accelerated the development of the thesis. She has set high standards and expectations, fostering a culture of dedication and discipline among her peers. At the same time, Benita set a really nice standard and expectation, that students are climbing, hiking, and knitting over the weekends and after hours, and totally not responding to emails from a slightly crazy supervisor. I am grateful for the valuable lessons she has imparted on me.

Her dissertation, together with several promising collaborations, several successful presentations at international conferences and various teaching experiences from working on field courses in Panama, she obtained as a PhD student, have convinced me, that Benita is ready for an independent research career, if she wishes to continue in academia. Yet, I believe the various skills she gained, will be applicable also



outside of academia, especially in the fields of scientific outreach and teaching, fields which I know Benita is very passionate about.

In summary, it is my opinion that Benita Laird-Hopkins has clearly demonstrated her intellectual prowess throughout her doctoral journey, with a remarkable blend of independence and social and practical skills essential for high quality research. I am confident that she is well-prepared for a successful and impactful career, whether within academia or beyond.

Sincerely,

Katerina Sam

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