

Henrik Mouritsen Awarded Prize for Excellent Research

The Universitätsgesellschaft Oldenburg (UGO) has awarded Prof. Dr. Henrik Mouritsen its Prize for Excellent Research, which includes 5,000 euros in prize money. Mouritsen was selected for “his outstanding research in the field of Neurosensorics/Animal Navigation,” according to the jury statement.

The Prize for Excellent Research was



awarded for the first time in 2012. The UGO awards it in alternation with its Prize for an Outstanding PhD Thesis. “With this prize our aim is to honour not only the person but also Oldenburg as an outstanding research location, and to bring it into the public eye,” UGO Chairman Michael Wefers explained.

Henrik Mouritsen (43) has been conducting research and teaching at Oldenburg University since 2002, and earned his habilitation there in 2005. He has turned down offers of professorships in Manchester, Kiel and Bayreuth in favour of remaining at Oldenburg. He has held the Lichtenburg Chair, endowed with 1.5 million euros, since 2007. In 2011 he was awarded the “Eric Kandel Young Neuroscientists Prize”. As head of the international research group “Neurosensorik/

Animal Navigation”, Mouritsen was able to demonstrate that birds use the Earth’s magnetic field to orient in two different ways. Photosensitive molecules in their eyes enable them to sense the compass direction of the magnetic field. Furthermore, the birds have a magnetic sensor in their upper beak which is connected to their brain stem via the ophthalmic branch of the trigeminal nerve. For both orientation systems, the group led by Mouritsen was able to locate the area of the birds’ brain involved. Mouritsen’s research extends into the newly emerging field of quantum biology. Together with physicists and chemists from Oxford University, Mouritsen is investigating to what extent, the birds’ magnetic sensor fundamentally relies on quantum mechanical principles.

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