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Cover page: Pioneers colonizing tephra covered lava fields on southern slopes of Surtsey.
Photo: Sigurður H. Magnússon, July 18, 2012

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Introduction

The year 2013 marked the 50 years' anniversary of the start of the Surtsey eruption and the formation of an island. The eruption is one of the longest eruptions in historic times in Iceland and lasted from 14th of November 1963 to 5th of June 1967. The Surtsey 50th Anniversary Conference was held in Reykjavík, Iceland, 12-15 of August 2013 entitled: "Geological and Biological Development of Volcanic Islands". It was organised by the Surtsey Research Society in cooperation with the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, The University of Iceland, The Agricultural University of Iceland, The Marine Research Institute, The Environment Agency of Iceland and the South Iceland Nature Centre.

The organizing committee of the conference arranged for a special issue in the international scientific journal "Biogeosciences". The special issue had the same title as the conference "Geological and Biological Development of Volcanic Islands" (see http://www.biogeosciences.net/special_issue152.html). Handling editor for the special issue was Jens-Arne Subke and guest editors were: Bjarni D. Sigurdsson, Páll Einarsson, Borgþór Magnússon, Karl Gunnarsson, Henning Adersen, Steven Jewett, Timothy New, and Nemesio M. Pérez. Of the ten articles in the special issue, eight focus on research on Surtsey.

Numerous articles and books have been published on the island's development and one of the main aims of the Surtsey Research Society is to promote both scientific and popular publications from research and findings on the island. An important part of that has been the publication of a report series "Surtsey Research" with scientific findings from the island and related areas. The first report appeared fifty years ago, in 1965. Here the Surtsey Research Society publishes the 13th issue of the "Surtsey Research", which also is based on presentations from the 50 years anniversary conference (http://www.surtsey.is/afm_50/Surtsey_ProgrammeAbstracts.pdf). This new issue is published online only, not in print as the previous issues. It will be accessible on the home page of the Surtsey Research Society (http://www.surtsey.is/pp_ens/write_ref_2.htm).

Editors of this issue were: Borgþór Magnússon, Icelandic Institute of Natural History, Páll Einarsson, University of Iceland, Bjarni D. Sigurðsson, Agricultural University of Iceland and Karl Gunnarsson, Marine Research Institute of Iceland. On behalf of the Surtsey Research Society, I would like to thank the editors for their work.

The 50th anniversary of the island was also highlighted by the publication of the book "Surtsey in Focus" in 2014, from the authors Erling Ólafsson and Lovísa Ásbjörnsdóttir at the Icelandic Institute of Natural History. The book provides an exceptional opportunity to view the hidden world of Surtsey through numerous photographs and text.

Surtsey is a scientifically unique area. It offers an outstanding example of a virgin, volcanic island that is being actively created and shaped by geological, geomorphological and ecological processes. The Surtsey island immediately caught the interest of scientists as a singular opportunity to study geology in the making, as well as the settlement of life on a relatively sterile piece of land out in the ocean. In July 2008, the island of Surtsey and the surrounding sea was awarded a World Heritage Site status by the UNESCO's World Heritage Committee. In the committee's justification for this decision the scientific work that has continuously been carried out on the island from the start of the eruption was given as the main reason for Surtsey gaining this status. Furthermore, because the island and the surrounding sea were declared a nature reserve as early as 1965 and have thus been protected from human impact, as far as possible.

The aim of the Surtsey Research Society is to protect and raise the interest on scientific work related to Surtsey island. The anniversary conference was a success and we, the board of the society, trust that in the next 50 years, extensive research will continue on the island, and that there will be many opportunities for scientists to meet and publish results to increase the knowledge on the formation and development of volcanic islands.

Hallgrímur Jónasson,
Chairman Surtsey Research Society