

Newsletter # 1

January 2007

CSEE Canadian Society for
Ecology and Evolution

Société Canadienne
d'Écologie et d'Évolution **SCEE**

Edited by *Marco Festa-Bianchet*

President's Message

CSEE: The First Six Months

After the inaugural meeting in April the new society quickly got down to work. The first item to be tackled was to become legally incorporated on the basis of the Constitution that was voted on by the membership. Minor changes were required by Corporations Canada, but the revised constitution follows the letter and spirit of the original. Our Society is now legally recognized as a not-for-profit organization (October 2006). The revised Constitution can be viewed, in English and in French, on the Society website (www.ecoevo.ca).

One of our main priorities was to maintain the momentum generated by the inaugural meeting by finding a site for a full scientific meeting in 2007. Toronto stepped forward to host this meeting and planning is now in full swing: Locke Rowe lays out the schedule leading up to the meeting later in the newsletter. This will be a landmark in the history of ecology and evolution in Canada, the first time that the whole community comes together with a full program of talks and activities, and we are all looking forward to a very exciting event. We have already had offers to host the 2008 meeting (UBC, Vancouver) and the 2009 meeting (Dalhousie, Halifax), confirming the broad base of enthusiastic support that led to the creation of the Society.

The Society has continued to maintain contacts with NSERC, and after a Council meeting in December we met with the staff responsible for administering GSC18 to discuss funding issues, especially those relating to the Discovery Grant program. Sally Otto gives an account of this meeting later in the newsletter; our contact with NSERC will clearly become very important in the coming months as the structure of the GSC system is revised. We also met with Mme Isabelle Blain, the Vice-President (Research Grants), to float the concept of a Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution. Doug Morris describes this bold initiative below and explains how the Society hopes to foster a major expansion of opportunities for advancing research and training.

One of our ambitions has been to promote fundamental research in ecology and evolution to government, the press and the public, and we have struggled to find a way of doing this effectively. Some issues seemed to demand an immediate response, and the Society could rise to the occasion. The most prominent was the rejection of a grant proposal by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for reasons that seemed to involve regarding evolution and intelligent design as equally valid interpretations of the natural world. I quickly sent a letter to

SSHRC (it's on our website) and helped the Royal Society of Canada to draft a response. In other cases it was less clear how we could produce a rapid response that would reflect the views of the membership. We have decided to initiate a more systematic approach by joining the Partnership Group for Science and Engineering (PAGSE), which includes representatives from the dozen or so major national scientific societies. PAGSE holds monthly meetings with high-level representatives from the federal government and industry, and also hosts breakfast meetings where scientists (such as Council member Jeff Hutchings) explain current issues to MPs. It is an effective and well-regarded body that will bring the Society (which means you) into regular contact with the people ultimately responsible for funding our research.

We expect that the scale of the Society's activities will continue to increase in 2007. I'll be providing another update in Toronto, and hope to see you there.

Graham Bell

The CSEE's inaugural meeting

In early April 2006, just as the warm spring winds were picking up, Montreal was the host to the inaugural meeting of the CSEE-SCEE. The meeting was held at the Université du Québec à Montreal (UQAM) and was co-hosted by McGill University. It was an exciting and proud time for many as we witnessed the birth of our new society. This historic occasion was marked by a welcome address from NSERC president Dr. Suzanne Fortier. After much discussion and deliberation, a constitution was approved and a newly minted council was voted in. There were over 350 participants in attendance and 189 posters were presented in the short two day meeting.

One of the goals of the inaugural meeting was to help raise awareness of the exciting research that is conducted by ecologists and evolutionists in this country. To that end, six keynote speakers were invited to speak about their research and the contribution of curiosity-driven research to Canada. Dynamic and stimulating lectures were given by: Yves Bergeron (UQAM), Louis Fortier (Laval), Paul Hebert (Guelph), Judith Myers (UBC), Catherine Potvin (McGill) and Dolph Schluter (UBC).

There was a strong presence of our national funding body, NSERC, at the meeting. In addition to having a booth in the poster hall, NSERC held sessions with graduate students and postdocs and another with university professors to discuss funding issues, especially as they apply to GSC's 18 and 9. There was also a general panel discussion on GSC 18 issues with former members of the committee in attendance to answer questions from the floor.

The inaugural meeting was co-chaired by Graham Bell (McGill) and Denis Réale (UQAM). The Local Organizing Committee consisted of UQAM members: Beatrix Beisner, Frank Berninger, Kerri Finlay and France Landry and McGill members: Andrew Gonzalez, Frédéric Guichard and Dan Schoen. Thanks to the army of student volunteers from both universities, as well as to Marylène Boulet, Julie Jeukens and Louis Bernatchez (Laval) who helped ensure a successful start to the annual CSEE-SCEE meetings. We hope to see you all again in Toronto in May 2007!

Beatrix Beisner and Denis Réale

Membership

We believe that the Society is vital to ensure the future of Ecology and Evolution in Canada, and we aim for the broadest possible membership. Hoping that you support our objectives, we prompt you to renew your membership for 2007 and to encourage colleagues and friends to become members. Please note that your 2006 dues covered your membership until December 31 of that year.

To renew your membership or become a new member, please complete the online form on the Society's website and make your payment before February 15th 2007. Remember that you become an official member only once your dues are paid. Dues for regular members remain at CAN\$40 and those for students and post-doctoral members at CAN\$20.

As in 2006, your membership dues will be used to cover the costs of the society's business, running meetings, supporting targeted workshops, and publishing policy statements and other documents to improve the communication of our work.

We would greatly appreciate if you could make your payment online (<http://ecoevo.ca/en/membership.htm>) with PayPal: it's fast, free and secure. Although you can pay by cheque, cheques involve cumbersome handling and additional costs for the Society in terms of envelopes and stamps to mail receipts.

If payment cannot be made by Paypal, please send a cheque made out to CSEE care of:

Louis Bernatchez (membership)
Département de biologie
Pavillon Charles-Eugène Marchand
Université Laval
Québec QC
G1K 7P4
Canada

Many thanks for your support!

Louis Bernatchez, Treasurer

Call for Nominations

Terms for the positions of Vice-President, Secretary, three regular councilors, and student councilor in the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution end on 31 December 2007. An election to fill these positions will be held during Spring 2007. Nominations for the election are made jointly by the Nominating Committee and the general membership. Council thereby solicits nominations for these positions.

Nominations must be made through the Society's Nominating Committee, and must be supported by five or more members in good standing. Only regular, life, and student members are eligible for nomination. Nominations should be accompanied with confirmation that the nominee agrees to stand for election.

Please send nominations with all supporting materials **before 1 March 2007** to:

Douglas Morris
Chair, Nominating Committee, CSEE
Department of Biology
Lakehead University
Thunder Bay, ON
P7B 5E1

CSEE Meeting, University of Toronto, May 17-20, 2007

The 1st General Meeting of the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution will be hosted by the University of Toronto's newly formed Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from May 17 – 20, 2007.

The current program includes plenary speakers, symposia, workshops, 135 contributed talks and two evening poster sessions. Our goal for the 2007 CSEE meeting is to encourage scientific communication, collaboration and camaraderie between students and faculty in ecology and evolution across the country.

- Our plenary addresses will feature Drs. Aneil Agrawal UT, Diane Srivastava UBC, and Julie Turgeon Laval.
- 3 half-day symposia are scheduled on the topics of Ecological Genomics, Gamete Evolution and Ecology, and Natural Selection.
- 2 evening workshops are scheduled on the Species at Risk Act and the proposed Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution.
- We will also offer a tour of the Koffler Scientific Reserve, as well as opportunities to visit with the curatorial staff at the Royal Ontario Museum.

The meeting will be held at Victoria College, on the St. George Campus of the University of Toronto. Victoria College is an ideal venue for conferences because it incorporates modern amenities within a charming historical atmosphere. Facilities at Victoria College include the Isabel Bader Theatre, a five-year old hall that seats 500, several electronic lecture halls and ample space for socializing. Residences for guests are located directly across the verdant quad from the

College. In addition, Victoria College is a mere block from Bloor Street, allowing attendees direct access to dining, museums and entertainment throughout the course of the meeting. We are confident that all attendees of the 2007 meeting will find Victoria College comfortable, convenient and well-equipped to handle their diverse needs.

More details can be found at the meeting website (www.eeb.utoronto.ca/CSEE/), where we will shortly post information for registration and submission of abstracts.

Local Organizing Committee: Locke Rowe (Chair), Doug Morris (CSEE VP), Maydianne Andrade, Cait Dmitriew, Michael Kasumovic, Jessamyn Manson, Jen Perry, Jess Ward.

Contact: Locke Rowe (csee@eeb.utoronto.ca)

An Invitation from the CSEE Council to Attend the 2007 CSEE Workshop “A Proposal for a Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution”

Council is working to create a Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution with a mandate to address the four purposes of the CSEE:

1. to promote the study of ecology and evolution in Canada;
2. to raise public awareness of the importance of ecology and evolution to Canadian society;
3. to facilitate communication between members of the Society and decision-makers in the public, private and non-governmental sectors;
4. to act as liaison with Federal and Provincial funding agencies to support and promote ecological and evolutionary research in Canada.

To meet these purposes, we envisage an institute with activities such as:

- identifying promising research themes at the dynamic interface between ecology and evolution;
- providing teams of Canadian and international scholars with financial, physical, analytical, and human resources to support ecological and evolutionary research;
- disseminating knowledge and transferring skills through symposia and workshops
- building Canada's research capacity for young scientists through graduate courses targeted at promising postdoctoral and graduate-student researchers;
- archiving Canada's ecological and evolutionary legacy with fully accessible data depositories;
- adding value to Canadian research through synergistic projects that merge disciplines, ideas, data, and their synthesis;

- solving evolutionary and ecological problems of strategic interest to Canada, Canadians, and the world's peoples;
- evaluating the ecological and evolutionary consequences of Canada's dependence on, and management of, natural resources;
- supplying the best possible scientific advice to policy advisors and decision makers;
- creating a central node for public education and outreach.

Council met with NSERC during our December council meeting to promote the institute concept and to seek advice on, and support for, its creation. NSERC officials were quick to note that the institute could build Canadian research capacity, add value to existing and future research programs, integrate research across government departments, and inform policy. We were thus urged to apply for operating funds from NSERC's revised Major Resources Support (MRS) program. The MRS program provides partial funding to a variety of Canadian institutes in areas such as theoretical physics, mathematics and computer sciences. We were also urged to consider CFI, should its funding be renewed, as a mechanism to create the institute's necessary physical infrastructure.

Encouraged by NSERC's positive response, we are now poised to take the next steps of identifying leaders to search for the institute's home, to flesh out the institute's vision and mandate, and to complete the necessary proposals for funding. Each step will require hard work and commitment from members of our Society. **Council plans to start the ball rolling at a Society Workshop during our Meeting in Toronto.** We urge all members interested in the CIEE initiative to attend the workshop, to share their ideas, and to help with the research and infrastructure applications. We hope to see you there.

Douglas Morris

CSEE and NSERC: An on-going and productive dialogue

In 2005, roundtable discussions were held at NSERC headquarters in Ottawa to discuss the state of ecological and evolutionary research in Canada. It was abundantly clear that our community needed a Society to engage in dialogue with NSERC and other government agencies and to facilitate communication amongst ourselves. With the encouragement of NSERC, CSEE was formed.

To further show their support, NSERC representatives attended the inaugural meeting of CSEE in April 2006, providing information sessions on funding sources for student and faculty. If you want to know what happens to your grant after it is submitted, browse through the NSERC presentations on the CSEE web-site (<http://www.ecoevo.ca/en/announcements.htm>). NSERC President Dr. Suzanne Fortier praised the formation of our society and encouraged our growth.

In December 2006, CSEE held another roundtable discussion with NSERC. We emphasized that:

* Ecological and evolutionary research in Canada makes fundamental contributions to our understanding of how biodiversity arises and can be protected and how the health of ecosystems depends on human activities.

* Canadian research in ecology and evolution is world-renowned. We have maintained one of the highest levels of productivity per grant dollar in the world (Peters et al. 1996). A recent report on the State of Science & Technology in Canada demonstrated that Ecology and Evolution was in the top three of 125 sub-fields when both publication quality and intensity were combined (<http://www.scienceadvice.ca> (English) or <http://www.sciencepourlepublic.ca> (French)).

* Building on our strength, ecology and evolution is a very attractive and growing field in Canada. Indeed, in the last two years, roughly 1/3 of applicants to the GSC-18 panel were seeking their first NSERC grant.

Unfortunately, GSC-18 is witnessing a severe crunch from two sides. It received the worst funding reallocation in 2002 and a large subsequent increase in terms of new applicants. GSC 18 only receives approximately \$13,000 per year in additional funding for each new applicant, much less than the average starting grant of \$25,700 (GSC-18 in 2006).

In our discussions, NSERC representatives had some good news. There will no longer be external Reallocations Exercises like the previous three. Instead, starting in 2008, funding will be adjusted dynamically through a formula that accounts for growth and cost of research, among other measures. The exact formula has yet to be finalized, and we believe that dialogue with NSERC has been critically helpful at this juncture. NSERC is also reevaluating its entire GSC structure. CSEE has expressed its willingness to provide feedback and advice as NSERC heads in these new directions.

The future for research funding in Ecology and Evolution depends on several factors outside of the hands of NSERC, in particular government support for basic research. Lobbying for the importance of basic research is essential. While our partnership with PAGSE is a beginning (see page 1), we should all consider writing our local MPs, describing how our research impacts broader society, and arguing for the need to support fundamental scientific discoveries through research funding.

In other news from NSERC, a new program will be launched to support promising research identified through the Discovery Grants program. Each GSC will nominate a small number of grants for a "Discovery Accelerator" supplement of \$40,000/year for three years (a total of 50 such grants will be available, amounting to ~1.6% of applicants).

The CSEE Council is proud to have established a collegial and open dialogue with NSERC. We believe that this is the best way to work together to identify problems and solutions in the funding of ecological and evolutionary research within Canada.

Sally Otto

DESIGN A LOGO FOR THE CSEE! FIRST PRIZE 500\$!

We have recently launched a contest to find a logo representing the Society. The First Prize is an award of \$500 in support of research or travel expenses for attending the CSEE meeting. The contest is open to graduate students and post-doctoral fellows who are members of the CSEE. For more information, visit <http://www.ecoevo.ca/en/findlogo.htm>. Note that deadline for submitting artwork is March 1st 2007.

Show us the artist in you!

Marylene Boulet

EDITOR'S NOTES

This Newsletter will be a vehicle to disseminate news and information to members of the CSEE. This first issue is rather amateurish (I was only recently chosen as Editor, beating out several talented competitors) and we'll work on improving its appearance. I thank Marie-Josée Fortin and all other members of the CSEE Council for their help in putting together this issue on a very short notice and I am grateful to Véronique Connolly for translations. We plan on 2-3 issues per year that will be sent by e-mail to all members. Because many servers routinely block bulk e-mailings with attachments, we'll follow that with an e-mail informing members that if they did not receive the Newsletter they can download it from the CSEE's web page. We are not currently planning to send it by regular mail. I would appreciate any feedback on this policy.

I invite all members to provide either short articles, announcements or ideas for what should be in the Bulletin. We are particularly interested in conference announcements and other newsy items. Submissions in both languages are particularly welcomed, otherwise we'll look after the translation.

As one of the goals of the CSEE is to make ecology and evolution research and education more relevant to Canadians, we ask that members ensure that they are on '**expert lists**' at their home institutions. Over the next few months, the CSEE communications subcommittee (Denis Réale, Bea Beisner and Mark Forbes) will be collating a list of experts with the intention of making this a searchable database available to media personnel.

NEXT MEETINGS – During its meeting in Ottawa in December, the CSEE Council approved a proposal to hold the CSEE 2008 meeting at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. The 2009 meeting is tentatively scheduled for Dalhousie University in Halifax.

Marco Festa-Bianchet m.festa@Usherbrooke.ca

Annual Meeting 2007

Submissions are solicited for the 1st General Meeting of the [Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution](#), to be held at the [University of Toronto, May 17 - 20, 2007](#).

<http://www.eeb.utoronto.ca/CSEE/>

CSEE Council/Conseil du SCEE

[Graham Bell](#) (McGill University, President/Président)

[Douglas Morris](#) (Lakehead University, Vice-President/Vice-Président)

[Sarah Otto](#) (University of British Columbia, Secretary/Secrétaire)

[Louis Bernatchez](#) (Université Laval, Treasurer/Trésorier)

[Marie Josée Fortin](#) (University of Toronto; Council member 2006 – 2007/Membre du Conseil)

[Jeffrey Hutchings](#) (Dalhousie University; Council member 2006 – 2007/ Membre du Conseil)

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[Marylène Boulet](#) (Duke University; Student/Post-doctoral Council member 2006 – 2007/Étudiant Membre du Conseil)