

Newsletter # 2

May 2007

CSEE Canadian Society for
Ecology and Evolution

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

Edited by *Marco Festa-Bianchet*

President's Message

The most important external issue we have been concerned with since the January newsletter has been the forthcoming review of the Discovery Grants program. The worth of this program, the core source of research support for most CSEE members, has recently been questioned, in part because of the high success rate of applicants, relative to similar programs in other fields or in other countries. An international panel will be convened in the Fall to review the program and make recommendations about its future. CSEE has made two responses to this. First, acting on a request from NSERC, we have suggested suitable candidates for the panel. At the same time, we submitted a reasoned defence of the Discovery Grants program, emphasizing its crucial contribution to the acknowledged excellence of ecology and evolution research in Canada. Secondly, we have written to Dr Suzanne Fortier, the President of NSERC, dealing with the provisions of the Federal budget of March 2007. These included an additional allocation of \$37m to NSERC, targeted to three priority areas, of which "environment" was one. We argued that \$11.25m of this new funding should be used to support the fundamental environmental research conducted by applicants to GSC18 and GSC9. If this proposal is accepted, it would restore historical levels of funding to our field. I hope that I can report success in our next bulletin.

Naturally, our attention has been focused on the Toronto meeting that will kick off very soon. We have good registration and a full scientific program, along with many other events. I would like to draw your attention to one in particular, the workshop that is being organized to discuss plans for a Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution. Doug Morris has more to say about this later in the Bulletin, but I want to emphasize the importance of making your contribution to this bold new

initiative. If we are to spearhead a major grant application for 2008 we shall need the enthusiastic participation of as many members as possible. Hope to see you there!

Graham Bell

Finances going from bad to worse for NSERC GSC 18 (Ecology and Evolution).

It is a reasonable guess that most members of the CSEE that applied for a Discovery Grant last fall were disappointed when they heard from NSERC this spring. As a member of the GSC18, I endured an extremely unpleasant week in Ottawa, giving people much less than they deserved and witnessing, once again, how fundamental research in Ecology and Evolution in Canada is both superlative and underfunded. Here is a brief presentation of this year's competition, you can see more details and read the Annual Report of GSC18 on the CSEE website. The budget for returning applicants was 10% less than what those applicants had obtained in the previous competition. A 10% budget cut, therefore, is the equivalent of 'level' funding. Of course, if you received 10% less than 5 years ago, in terms of purchasing power your grant was reduced by about 20%. In this competition, the average award was \$29,386 (\$22,334 for first-time applicants, \$24,396 for those renewing for the first time and \$35,634 for second or later renewals). Success rate was 53% for first-time applicants and 81% for returning applicants (including those previously unsuccessful). The special budget for first-time applicants (\$608K) was insufficient to produce an acceptable success rate (NSERC rules are that at least 50% of new applicants must be funded), it was boosted by further taxing of the budget for returning applicants. Despite a strong desire not to underfund first-time applicants, however, many new researchers in Ecology and Evolution are facing 5 years of Discovery Grant funding at less than \$ 20K a year. It is particularly striking that, for the second year in a row, fully a quarter of applicants (51/212) to NSERC GSC 18 were new to the DG program. Funded researchers applying for their third or later grant made up only 41% of the pool (87/212). The substantial growth in our discipline is a welcomed sign that research in Ecology and Evolution may play a stronger role in helping Canada face the environmental, social and economic challenges of this century. Government support for that research, however, is disappointing. You will have seen from the President's Message and from the proposed Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution that the CSEE has taken several

initiatives to voice our concern and improve funding for ecologists and evolutionary biologists. Your support for the Society's initiatives and your participation in its decisions is crucial.
Marco Festa-Bianchet, CSEE Council member and GSC 18 member

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

Planning for the meetings is going very well! We now have nearly 400 registered attendees from all of the provinces, the US and the UK. There is a full slate of 3 plenaries, 2 workshops, 21 symposia talks, 180 contributed talks, and 120 posters. There are several other events, including a trip to Koffler Scientific Reserve, student presentation prizes, an open meeting with NSERC officials, and our CSEE meeting of the membership. Details on all of these are available at the conference website (<http://www.eeb.utoronto.ca/CSEE/>), and more information will appear shortly. Please check for updates of the website regularly. We're looking forward to seeing all of you in a few weeks!

Locke Rowe, Chair of the Local Organizing Committee.

Workshop 1: Friday 18 May 19:30-21:00

A CANADIAN INSTITUTE OF ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION

Background

Council met with NSERC in December to promote the concept of an Ecology and Evolution institute for Canada. 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.

Council will work with the Canadian research community to generate a winning proposal. In order to do so, we need to evaluate and build support for the initiative, develop the institute's mandate, determine its primary activities, document what makes the institute unique, create an appropriate organizational structure, search for an excellent host facility, and identify the applicants and co-applicants to write the proposal.

We will address each issue in a special workshop designed to seek your advice and assistance. We urge you to participate in this important event, to share your ideas, and to help with the application.

PROGRAM:

19:30	<p>Introduction:</p> <p>Why do we have a workshop, how is it organized, and what do we hope to achieve?</p> <p>Douglas Morris, Lakehead University</p>
19:35	<p>Why should the CSEE take the lead?</p> <p>Graham Bell, McGill University</p>
19:40	<p>What can we learn from existing Institutes?</p> <p>NESCent The National Evolutionary Synthesis Center, Durham, NC, USA</p> <p>Sarah Otto, University of British Columbia</p> <p>NCEAS, National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, Santa Barbara, CA, USA</p> <p>Peter Abrams, University of Toronto</p>
19:50	<p>The Canadian opportunity:</p> <p>NSERC MRS program and other funding</p> <p>Mark Forbes, Carleton University</p> <p>Searching for a home? The Koffler Scientific Reserve</p> <p>Art Weis, University of Toronto</p>
20:00	<p>Discussion:</p> <p>Why do we need the CIEE? What is the mandate of the CIEE? What would the CIEE do? How would the CIEE be organized? What makes the CIEE unique? Who should carry the application forward?</p>
20:45	<p>Summary and next steps:</p> <p>Graham Bell, McGill University</p>

Workshop 2: Saturday 19 May 19:30-21:00

Canada's Species at Risk Act (SARA): a primer

The Species at Risk Act was proclaimed in 2003. Many current members of the CSEE had signed a letter pointing out that SARA provided very weak protection for biodiversity. Since then, much money has been spent on SARA-related administration, public consultations and other initiatives. It has become clear that decisions about the conservation of biodiversity in Canada are much more affected by economic and political considerations than by scientific knowledge. Greater involvement of Canadian ecologists and evolutionary biologists in various aspects of SARA, from assessment to recovery, is required to reverse that trend. This workshop will present a brief overview of the functioning of SARA, outlining how members of the CSEE may become involved in the 'SARA process', from membership in COSEWIC to participation in Recovery Teams and provision of expert advice when needed. The workshop will include three presentations and a plenary discussion. In addition to encouraging the CSEE to take a position on species at risk, the workshop should stimulate involvement by CSEE members in the SARA process.

PROGRAM::

Introduction and welcome: Jeff Hutchings, Dalhousie University

Introduction to COSEWIC: the assessment process, Designatable Units and biases in the listing of Endangered Species in Canada - Marco Festa-Bianchet, Université de Sherbrooke

How is Recovery supposed to work? – Dave Fraser, BC Environment Ministry

Is Recovery working? Pete Ewins, WWF Canada

Questions to all speakers and comments from the floor (5 minutes)

Plenary discussion (25 minutes). Possible topics:

1. What are the most important research needs for improved assessment and recovery of species at risk in Canada? (e.g. taxonomy, habitat requirements, population dynamics, landscape mapping, genetics, quantifying the precautionary principle, ecological cost-benefit analyses, identifying Designatable Units etc.). What can members of the CSEE contribute?
2. What can CSEE, as an expert scholarly society, contribute to the SARA process (providing scientific advice to governments, examining CVs of members of COSEWIC, disseminating information about opportunities for ecologists to contribute, issuing a Position Statement, etc.).

CSEE Logo Contest

A few months ago the CSEE launched a contest to find a logo that would effectively represent our Society. The contest was very successful: we received 11 nicely designed logos. Clearly, some of our members are very talented artists. The Council members selected the logos created by Isla Myers-Smith (University of Alberta), Katrine Turgeon (McGill University), and Mainassara Zaman-Allah (INRAT). Congratulations to the nominees!

These three logos will be presented at the CSEE meeting in Toronto. Attending members will have the chance to vote for their preferred logo and the results of the contest will be announced during the meeting. The winning logo will be used for official CSEE communications.

On behalf of all Council members, I want to thank all the “scientific artists” who created a logo specifically for the CSEE. For those who will be attending the meeting, please do not forget to come over to see the artworks made by fellow scientists and to cast your vote!

Marylène Boulet, Student/Postdoctoral Council Member

CSEE Meeting, University of British Columbia, May 11-14, 2008

Save these dates: The 2008 annual meeting of the CSEE will be held May 11-14 at the University of British Columbia, in Vancouver. Details will be available this fall at <http://www.ecoevo.ca>.

Sarah Otto, Chair of the Local Organizing Committee.

EDITOR'S NOTES

This Newsletter is a vehicle to disseminate news and information to members of the CSEE. I thank all other members of the CSEE Council that contributed to this issue and Véronique Connolly for translations. The Newsletter is 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.

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.

Marco Festa-Bianchet m.festa@Usherbrooke.ca

Annual Meeting 2007

The 1st General Meeting of the [Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution](#) will 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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