

Newsletter # 3  
January 2008



**CSEE** Canadian Society for  
Ecology and Evolution

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

Edited by *Marco Festa-Bianchet*

### **President's Message**

Two reviews of deep concern to members of CSEE are currently under way at NSERC. The first is the review of the Discovery Grants program conducted by an international advisory panel that I mentioned in the previous Bulletin. The panel has been convened and has already met once. The second concerns the GSC structure within the program, and is also now under way. The mandate and membership of these committees can be found on the NSERC website at [http://www.nserc.gc.ca/about/membership\\_e.asp](http://www.nserc.gc.ca/about/membership_e.asp) and [http://www.nserc.gc.ca/about/GSC\\_advisory\\_comm\\_e.asp](http://www.nserc.gc.ca/about/GSC_advisory_comm_e.asp). CSEE was invited to present briefs to both committees, which we did in August. You will find the letters on the CSEE website. We emphasized the importance of the Discovery Grants program in supporting basic research in Canada, and pointed out that it has been particularly successful in the field of ecology and evolution, where Canada ranks second in the world for rates of publication and citation relative to funding level. We also commented on the current GSC structure, arguing for the integrity of GSC18 but suggesting some improvements in procedures. Both committees will report early in 2008, and their recommendations could change the whole basis of funding for our research. We shall be following this situation closely and will keep you informed.

The President of NSERC, Dr Suzanne Fortier, responded to the letter we sent in April, requesting that the additional allocation made to NSERC in the Federal budget be applied in part

to relieving the pressure on funding in GSC18. Her reply emphasized that additional funding had been provided to the Discovery Grant program as a whole through the Accelerator Supplements, which GSC18 applicants were exceptionally successful in winning. Any additional funding to the program is welcome, of course, but our position remains that the expansion of the field of ecology and evolution in recent years has left it chronically underfunded, and this situation should be remedied as soon as possible.

The Ontario election led to some discussion within the CSEE around the issue of faith-based schools and the sort of biology curriculum they were likely to teach, fuelled by ambivalent remarks about creationism made by some of the candidates. The Society did not take a formal stance on these issues, because we did not want to be accused of interfering in provincial politics. We would welcome your feedback on whether you think that this decision was correct. What we did do was to develop a statement on creationism that is posted on our website and represents the formal position of the Society that can be cited whenever a similar situation arises. You are welcome to refer students and colleagues to it for a clear and unambiguous statement of why evolution alone should be taught as science in school classrooms.

*Graham Bell*

## **CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

### **A Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution**

The Executive and Council of the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution aim to advance the interests of Canada's ecologists and evolutionary biologists through creation of a National world-class Institute for ecology and evolution. The Institute initiative was presented at the Society's institute workshop during the 2007 annual meeting at the University of Toronto. Building on general approval by workshop participants, Council formed an *ad hoc* Institute Committee to evaluate opportunities for the Institute's creation. The Committee filed its report to Council at the November 2007 Executive Council meeting and asked Council to seek proposals for the Institute's establishment.

In order to ensure fairness so that all interested parties have equal opportunity to participate in this exciting initiative, **Council invites proposals to form a Canadian Institute for Ecology and Evolution.**

Completed proposals should be submitted via email as a single pdf attachment to the Society's President, Douglas Morris ([douglas.morris@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:douglas.morris@lakeheadu.ca)) **no later than 31 March 2008.** Proposals will be evaluated by Council. Selection of the most appropriate proposal will be announced at the 2008 annual meeting. **This proposal will be endorsed by Council to represent the Society's bid to create the Institute.**

**The entire proposal should not exceed 7 printed pages and must include:**

1. A short cover letter outlining how the proposed Institute will meet the broad mandate of:
  - advancing knowledge by integrating ecology and the study of evolution,
  - improving training and education of Canadian graduate students and post-doctoral fellows
  - solving problems in the fields of ecology and evolutionary biology that are particularly relevant to Canadians
  - being inclusive of the wide variety of interests and expertise in the Canadian ecology and evolution community
  
2. A letter of intent summarizing the key activities that the proposed Institute will perform during its first five years. This letter should follow the guidelines of the NSERC MRS program. The letter must indicate how the proposed Institute will differ from, or complement, other existing and international institutes and centres, highlight the unique features and opportunities of the Institute, and demonstrate how it will involve large numbers of users to add value to Canadian science and its application.
  
3. A plan of action to obtain funding and a timeline for implementation.

4. Identification of the proposed Director and a list of applicants and co-applicants who have agreed to contribute to the Institute's activities and assist in writing funding proposals.
5. An outline of the potential physical facilities and an organizational plan for the proposed Institute and its administration. At least one position on the board of directors/scientific advisory board must be reserved for a member of the Society's Executive, or the Executive's designate.

Although not obligatory, it would be desirable to include a letter from the host institution's administration indicating the type of commitment and support promised to build the proposed Institute's infrastructure and ensure its maintenance and day-to-day operation, as well as provisions for release time for the Institute's Director.

Applicants are urged to familiarize themselves with the MRS program (see <http://www.nserc.gc.ca/en/mrs/>) and other appropriate funding sources and to consider points raised by participants at the 2007 workshop (see the report at [http://www.ecoevo.ca/common/CIEE\\_Report\\_Nov2007.pdf](http://www.ecoevo.ca/common/CIEE_Report_Nov2007.pdf)).

*Doug Morris*

### **Update on NSERC**

The CSEE Council met with NSERC representatives in Ottawa on November 23, and the Executive met with NSERC President Dr. Suzanne Fortier and Vice-President Isabelle Blain. The discussion reaffirmed the close working relationship between the CSEE and NSERC and confirmed that NSERC broadly supports the goals of the CSEE in terms of financing basic research in ecology and evolution. Council also met with the Co-Chairs of GSC18. In all cases, there was remarkable agreement between Council and NSERC on desirable future funding directions of ecological and evolutionary research in Canada. NSERC, however, works within

the budget and directives it receives from government and the news there is mostly disappointing.

The additional funds granted to the Strategic program that led to an additional competition for research on “Environment” in 2007 will be included in the ‘regular’ Strategic competition in 2008. These funds result from the government’s selection of ‘priority’ areas: Environment, Energy and Information Communication Technology.

Funding of GSC18 this year, however, will be as inadequate as last year. The Discovery Grant program has not received any increase in budget. There are no new funds to absorb the many new applicants. This year there will be about 800 new researchers applying for Discovery Grants and only about 350 are expected to leave the system. The only financial solace will come from the increased allocation to Northern Supplements (about 40% of that budget goes to GSC18 applicants) and from the Discovery Accelerator Supplement (DAS – another acronym!) program, which will be nearly doubled this year compared to last year. Six promising researchers in Ecology and Evolution received DAS last year, out of 7 nominated by GSC18. This year, GSC18 should be allowed to nominate between 10 and 12 candidates. Researchers do not apply directly for DAS, the GSCs nominate candidates based on their performance and Discovery Grant application. This year, Universities were also allowed a quota of recent Discovery Grant awardees who could re-apply outside of their regular 5-year cycle. Apparently, only 3 applicants to GSC18 took this opportunity. Their applications will be considered as any other: they may or may not be nominated for a DAS, and their Discovery Grant may remain the same or change in either direction. To be eligible for nomination for a DAS, applicants must be awarded a minimum \$ 5K increase in their Discovery Grant or receive an above-average first grant.

There will not be any changes to GSC18 this year as a result of the ongoing re-evaluation of the Discovery Grant program. Pending recommendations to NSERC’s Committee on Grants and Scholarships, however, there may be changes in the 2009 competition.

Preliminary figures suggest there are about 212 applications to GSC18 this year, very similar to the number in the last 2 years. About 45 are first-time applicants, slightly fewer than in the last 2 years but again suggesting strong growth in our field that is not being matched by available funds. Final numbers will depend on transfers among Grant Selection Committees. Although applications by most ecologists and evolutionary biologists are in GSC18, allocation to a GSC is decided by NSERC and depends mostly upon the recommendations from the CGS Chairs' meeting in November. It is apparent that several plant ecologists attempted to move to GSC3 (Plant Biology). In the past, many of those that did so saw their grant level increase.

Finally, a couple of 'tips' to contribute to increased NSERC funding for Ecology and Evolution. First, the budget for RTI grants ("equipment grants" in old English) is demand-driven. The more applications received, the greater the budget for that GSC in future years. If you need equipment, apply and apply often. Second, if you are near the end of your research career, consider applying for a small Discovery Grant, even if it is for a short duration. If a researcher simply stops applying, the money from his or her grant goes into the general pool. If he or she applies for a reduced amount, however, that money stays within his or her 'home' GSC.

As reported elsewhere in this Newsletter, NSERC is actively looking for examples of successful NSERC-funded research that it can use to convince the Federal Government to increase funding for basic research. Please think about how you may contribute.

*Marco Festa-Bianchet*

### ***Vignettes needed: basic research in ecology and evolution benefits Canadians***

High quality research depends on our ability to obtain funding, which increasingly requires that we actively convince Government that basic research in ecology and evolution benefits Canadians. In recent conversations with the CSEE executive, the president of NSERC suggested that we provide clear examples of such benefits, which would then aid NSERC's ability to secure additional funding for the Discovery Grants program. To this end, we will produce a document

highlighting a few key examples, which will then be posted on the CSEE website and used for communicating to media and the general public.

We begin by asking you, the CSEE membership, to provide us with vignettes of how research funded by NSERC Discovery Grants has benefited Canadians. Such benefits can be diverse, ranging from direct practical applications to human health and well being (e.g., medicine, agriculture, fisheries) through to biodiversity, conservation, and sustainability (e.g., endangered species, climate change). Our goal is to show how **basic** research in ecology and evolution can have important practical benefits, even if such benefits are not necessarily envisioned at the outset. We stress that many good examples will come from the past – because the benefits of basic research are often apparent only after it has been completed. We are also interested in stories of how basic research funded by NSERC Discovery Grants has contributed to the career development of individuals who now make direct contributions to the benefit of Canadians.

Please send your vignettes, comprising a single paragraph and optimally including a photograph or other key illustration, to the Chair of the CSEE Communications Committee (andrew.hendry@mcgill.ca). Remember that you are writing for general readers (politicians and the public) rather than fellow scientists. Please also note that your contributions may be edited or rewritten as necessary. To expedite our efforts we ask that you send your suggestions by March 1, 2008. Thanks, and let the deluge begin.

*Andrew Hendry*

## **News from the CSEE Communications Subcommittee**

### **CSEE's Expert List**

As a result of a survey of our membership in October, we have put together a list of experts in various subject areas of interest to the media. Since the inception of the society two years ago, we have had several requests by the media to comment on issues touching upon our expertise in ecology and evolution. Most notably, the media has expressed interest in “intelligent design” and the Species at Risk Act. To facilitate our responses to the media, we selected a series of

topical issues likely to be of interest to the media and also compiled a list of members willing and able to comment on those issues. Survey respondents also suggested other issues where our expertise might be sought. We will soon develop a publicly available version of the expert list for our web site, which will allow reporters to contact professors, government and private researchers from around the country. In the future, we hope to update this expert list through our membership renewal form.

### **Local CSEE Representatives**

Over the past few months, the Communications Subcommittee has been compiling a list of local representatives for each university in Canada. The role of these contact people is to pass on announcements from the CSEE to university mailing lists that include graduate students, postdocs and faculty in Ecology and Evolution who might not otherwise see our messages. We are working hard to get the word out there about the CSEE and our activities and we greatly appreciate the help of these local representatives. If you suspect that your university does not have such a representative yet and you are willing to serve, please contact the incoming chair of the Communications Subcommittee, Andrew Hendry at: [andrew.hendry@mcgill.ca](mailto:andrew.hendry@mcgill.ca)  
*Beatrix Beisner, Mark Forbes and Denis Réale*

### **Message to student and post-doctoral members of the CSEE**

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to participate in the student and post-doc activities of the CSEE. I am pleased to be able to work with you in this new adventure. I see us as a united student and post-doctoral membership body, ready to absorb available resources provided by our Society, but also, ready to give them back to the members, in the goal of helping each other in the advancement of our future careers.

Typically, meeting new people is one of the biggest hurdles faced by students at conferences. I see the CSEE as a support system for students and post-docs, offering new opportunities to collaborate. I have planned a few activities, which I hope you will all agree should allow us to

bridge the “I don’t know anyone here” gap, or at least, take a step towards it. I welcome any suggestions you may have to facilitate discussions between our members.

Membership to the CSEE, including renewals, and registration for our next meeting in Vancouver will open in January 2008. I ask current student and post-doctoral members to encourage others to join. Membership is very cheap and valid for two years. As a bonus this year, 15 student travel awards worth \$500 each will be drawn at random among all students registered before February 15 for the conference in Vancouver, who will travel more than 500 km. In addition, prizes (\$500, \$300 and \$200) for the three best oral presentations and the three best posters will be awarded to participating students. A new link for students and post-docs on the CSEE web page has information on student activities planned for the 2008 conference.

If you have any questions, comments, or problems please email me at [nathalie-n.brodeur.1@ulaval.ca](mailto:nathalie-n.brodeur.1@ulaval.ca) I welcome suggestions on how to facilitate the participation of students in CSEE activities, so that I may speak on your behalf at council meetings.

Looking forward to meeting you in Vancouver,

*Nathalie Brodeur*, Student / Post-doctoral council member

### **Update on COSEWIC and SARA**

The year 2008 marks the fifth year since the Species at Risk Act (SARA) was proclaimed by parliament. Section 129 of SARA stipulates: “Five years after this section comes into force, a committee of the House of Commons, of the Senate or of both Houses of Parliament is to be designated or established for the purpose of reviewing this Act.” Thus, by no earlier (but potentially later) than June 2008, a parliamentary review of SARA will begin. The body most likely to conduct the review (at least initially) is the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development, currently chaired by Bob Mills, Conservative MP for the riding of Red Deer, Alberta. The review may not improve the assessment, recovery, protection and conservation of biodiversity in Canada. It is therefore important that members of the CSEE contribute to it.

To varying degrees, government (including provinces, territories, and the federal Departments of the Environment, Parks Canada and Fisheries & Oceans) has expressed concerns about:

- the high numbers of species assessed by COSEWIC (almost 600 wildlife species have been assessed at some level of risk)
- an inability to control tightly the assessment process (COSEWIC currently enjoys some independence in what it decides to assess, given its status as Canada's national science advisory body on species at risk)
- SARA's timelines for the preparation of recovery strategies, following legal listing (many recovery strategies and management plans are currently beyond schedule)

Government may wish to propose changes to SARA that influence:

- the responsibility for prioritising species to be assessed by COSEWIC (SARA currently identifies COSEWIC as the responsible body)
- the composition of COSEWIC and the means by which its membership is determined (for example, co-chairs of taxonomic specialist groups and non-government science members are currently appointed following an open competition administered by COSEWIC)
- the inflexibility (or flexibility, depending on your perspective) of the listing-decision timelines and deadlines for recovery strategies and the identification of critical habitat, specified by SARA
- the taxonomic level at which assessments should be conducted (SARA explicitly recognises assessments below the species level; some think this produces too many assessments; others argue that assessment below the species level is fundamental to the conservation of biodiversity)
- the degree to which range-peripheral or range-edge species should be assessed

In April 2007, COSEWIC established a Working Group to identify means of strengthening the Act. The CSEE should also think about how it wishes to contribute to this process. Council may, for example, wish to establish a SARA Parliamentary Review Working Group to collate, coordinate, and formulate the individual and societal contributions that the CSEE might make to

the parliamentary review of SARA. There are various ways in which such a process could take place, and we encourage members to provide their views to Council on this matter.

*Marco Festa-Bianchet and Jeff Hutchings*

**Pssitt! It is already January 2008! Do not forget... to renew your annual CSEE membership!**

Renewal fees for 2008 are the same as last year. Your membership dues are used to cover the costs of establishing the society, running meetings, supporting workshops, supporting student travel awards, and publishing policy statements and other documents to improve the communication of our work. Please renew your membership now on <http://www.ecoevo.ca/en/membership.htm>. Or, if you are planning on attending the Vancouver meeting, you can bundle your membership payment with your registration fees (<http://www.ecoevo.ca/ubc2008/en/registration.htm>).

Renewal, Regular Member: \$40

Renewal, Student / Postdoctoral Fellow: \$40 (VALID FOR TWO YEARS: from January 2008 to December 2009)

Lifetime membership: \$800

Thanks and Best Wishes for Year 2008!

*Marylène Boulet*

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

The annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution will be held at the University of British Columbia. We will open with an evening reception on May 11 followed by three full days of talks (May 12 – 14).

Information about the meeting is available at <http://www.ecoevo.ca/ubc2008/en/index.htm> where you can find the latest program information, book a residence, and register online. There will be three plenary speakers, including one by our past President:

- Dr. Graham Bell (McGill)
- Dr. Isabelle Côté (Simon Fraser)
- Dr. Michel Loreau (McGill)

as well as three symposia:

- Symposium in Honour of Ram Myers
- Food Webs in Metacommunities: Recent Progress in Theory and Experiment
- Evolutionary Applications

On May 11, before the meeting, there will be a *Symposium for Women Entering Ecology and Evolution Today* (SWEEET; <http://www.ecoevo.ca/ubc2008/SWEEET/index.html>); please contact [sweet2008@gmail.com](mailto:sweet2008@gmail.com) for more information.

On May 13, at the meeting, there will be a lunchtime workshop for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows on *Searching for and landing a job: How to get prepared for academia*; please contact Nathalie Brodeur <[nathalie-n.brodeur.1@ulaval.ca](mailto:nathalie-n.brodeur.1@ulaval.ca)> for more information.

And, of course, there will be plenty of time for contributed talks and posters. As with previous meetings, our goal is to encourage scientific communication, collaboration and camaraderie between students and faculty in ecology and evolution across the country.

We are pleased to announce that the registration fees will remain the same as last year (\$150 for student and post-doc members; \$200 for non-student members; \$300 for non-members), which includes lunches and refreshments. You can renew your membership at the same time (\$40 for two-year membership for students and post-docs; one-year for non-students). In addition, we have secured excellent prices for dorms and suites at UBC. To help us plan, *please register early*. Registration fees and housing costs will go up after March 1, which is also the deadline for abstract submission.

Local Organizing Committee: Sally Otto (Chair), Doug Morris (CSEE VP), Brad Anholt (Biology, University of Victoria), Kathy Martin (Forestry, UBC), Blake Matthews (post-doc, Zoology, UBC), Jon Shurin (Zoology, UBC).

Contact: Sally Otto ([conference@ecoevo.ca](mailto:conference@ecoevo.ca))

### **2009 CSEE meeting in Halifax**

The third annual CSEE meeting will be held in Halifax, NS from May 11th to 14th 2009. Co-chairs Tamara Romanuk and Sina Adl will be calling for symposia in the autumn of 2008 so start planning your hot topics now. In the works is a symposium to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Darwin's oeuvre "On the Origin of Species". We hope you will all plan to attend!

### **2010 CSEE meeting in Quebec City.**

The 4th CSEE meeting will be host by Université Laval in beautiful Quebec City from 9th-12th May 2010. More details to come in the next newsletters...

### **Thank you to retiring Council members and Welcome to new ones**

The Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution acknowledges the important contribution of four retiring members of Council: Marie-Josée Fortin, Denis Réale, Jeffrey Hutchings and Marylène Boulet. We also express our sincere appreciation to Graham Bell, Founding President of the Society, who provided strong and enlightened leadership during the critical first two years. We welcome incoming vice-president Spencer Barrett, who will take over the lead from the current President Doug Morris in two years, and new Council members Nathalie Brodeur, Kathy Martin, Andrew Hendry and Sean Rogers.

### **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 block bulk e-mailings with attachments, an additional e-mail will inform 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](mailto:m.festa@Usherbrooke.ca)

Annual Meeting 2008

The 2nd **General Meeting of the [Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution](#)** will be held at the **University of British Columbia, May 11-14, 2008.**

<http://www.ecoevo.ca/ubc2008/en/index.htm>

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CSEE Council/Conseil du SCEE

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

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

[Spencer Barrett](#) (University of Toronto, Vice-President/Vice-Président)

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

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