



Société canadienne  
d'écologie et d'évolution

Canadian Society of  
Ecology and Evolution

Newsletter # 4

June 2008

Edited by *Marco Festa-Bianchet*

## President's Message

### **R & R in the E & E**

I began to write this on the way home from another fabulous CSEE meeting in Vancouver. Buoyed by the success of our young Society, I began to reflect on the roles and responsibilities that we share as stewards of ecological and evolutionary knowledge. These are spelled out clearly as objectives in our constitution and on our webpage:

- (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 a liaison with Federal and Provincial funding agencies to support and promote ecological and evolutionary research in Canada

My 2008 report (also on our webpage) documents some of the main activities that your Executive Council is using to meet these objectives. I believe that each of us must ask ourselves how, as individual scientists, we can enhance the study of ecology and evolution, education, communication, and research funding. And we also must ask how we can do this effectively and quickly. The challenges are daunting, but not insurmountable.

### **Education:**

Most Canadians are thrilled to live in a nation flush with wilderness and boreal biodiversity. Most are concerned about the survival of our iconic species, about the loss of our fisheries,

and our role in preserving biodiversity around the globe. But few know that there is no wilderness, or that species are imperilled by the cumulative and interactive effects of individual actions and decisions. Fewer still have ever seen an Atlantic Cod or Polar Bear in the wild. And most have little appreciation for the diversity and vastness of Canada's native ecosystems.

The problem of ecological and evolutionary ignorance is, perhaps, most acute in our Universities where we work to educate an elite handful of like-minded individuals on evolution and ecology. We do it effectively and with great success. Meanwhile, the vast majority of our graduates receive less university education on ecology and evolution than they learned in elementary school. Are these graduates and tomorrow's decision makers ecologically and evolutionarily literate? Are they prepared to tackle the crises we face in conservation and climate warming? Clearly not.

One effective way to increase ecological and evolutionary literacy is to cultivate a culture that values knowledge. These changes in perspective will be difficult in our increasingly utilitarian world, but they are essential if we are to preserve life and human potential. So please, when you talk with your students and interact with the media, include statements on your passion for science, and why you thirst for knowledge. Encourage them to look beyond the most recent and fashionable discovery to hone a deeper respect for science, and its crucial role in society.

#### **Advocacy:**

Your Executive Council meets annually with Dr. Suzanne Fortier, President of NSERC, and

other high ranking officials. We promote the sciences of evolution and ecology, and seek additional funding for Discovery Grants, students, and post-doctoral fellows. We also belong to The Partnership Group for Science and Engineering (PAGSE) and work with that group to represent our collective interests to the Government of Canada. We write, whenever appropriate, to Federal Ministers and their Deputies. And we continue to seek partnerships with other organizations and individuals that can help us in advocating on behalf of the broad Canadian ecology and evolution community.

Whenever we ask for advice on our advocacy activities from specialists and Government officials, we receive three suggestions. 1. Continue your advocacy. 2. Present a clear, coherent, and consistent message. 3. But if you want action, write to, and talk with, your local Member of Parliament.

So here is the second challenge. On your birthday, write your MP. Do this every year. Ask your colleagues and students to do the same. Alert your MP to the crises we face in climate warming and biodiversity loss. Demonstrate why ecological and evolutionary research is pre-requisite to finding solutions. Emphasize the value of research and education, and distinguish them from application and commercialization. Sprinkle your letter with Canadian success stories that illustrate the merit of our science. Then conclude with clear advice on how Government can change the future.

#### **Science:**

Canadian evolutionary biologists and ecologists are world-class. We share a proud legacy as leaders on such fronts as the

ecological and evolutionary consequences of acid rain, climate warming, and global declines in marine fisheries. We also lead in many areas of evolutionary and biodiversity research including the global effort to barcode the diversity of life.

We volunteer our time to assessing and preserving Earth's biodiversity. We work tirelessly on research, we review colleague's manuscripts and grant proposals, and we often sacrifice our families to do so. Many of us participate directly in conservation, and many of our research programs are focused entirely on conservation biology. But few of us have tackled the root problem of too many people consuming too few resources.

Here, then, is the third challenge. Dedicate some of your time to understanding human population dynamics and evolution. Use that knowledge to educate, advocate, and seek solutions to the global crises that confront us.

I cannot promise that meeting these challenges will make a difference. But we certainly cannot accomplish our goals if we do nothing. Ecologists and evolutionary biologists have a heavy load of roles and responsibilities. We can make it much lighter by sharing the burden.

I wish you all the best in your research, and hope that you have an enjoyable and productive summer.

*Douglas Morris*

## **Update on NSERC**

Unfortunately, this update will look similar to the one from last year. More details are in the Annual Report of the GSC18 ([www.ecoevo.ca/common/AnnualReportGSC18\\_2008.pdf](http://www.ecoevo.ca/common/AnnualReportGSC18_2008.pdf)). Once again, funding for the Discovery Grant program in 2008 was not even sufficient to maintain renewing applicants at the level of funding obtained 5 years ago. Once again, members of GSC18 had to take very difficult decisions, giving people much less than they deserved. Serving on GSC 18 is an education on how research in Ecology and Evolution in Canada is both superlative and underfunded. In 2008, the budget for returning applicants was about 1.2% less than what those applicants had obtained in the previous competition. This was the smallest proportional cut of the last 5 years: during each of the last 5 competitions the amount available for returning applicants was less than what they were awarded the last time they applied. The shortfall was about 10% in 2007, so you had better luck if you applied this year – the 'cohort effect' remains strong and independent of the merit of one's research.

In the 2008 competition, the average award was \$26,510 (\$20,840 for first-time applicants, \$22,192 for those renewing for the first time and \$32,127 for second or later renewals). Success rate was 63% for first-time applicants and 74% for returning applicants (including those previously unsuccessful – for those already funded the success rate was 94%).

A fifth of applicants (40/211) to NSERC GSC 18 were new to the DG program. Funded researchers applying for their third or later

grant made up only 38% of the pool. Ecology and Evolution continue to be a growing discipline in Canada, but government support for fundamental research remains dismal.

This year, NSERC established a minimum funding level of 15,000 a year for Discovery Grants. GSC18 was also allowed to nominate 15 people for consideration for a Discovery Accelerator Supplement (DAS), which provides an extra \$ 40,000 annually for 3 years. Universities were allowed a quota of DG-holders that could apply outside their grant cycle, and these applicants were considered equally to all others by the Selection Committee: they may have been nominated for a DAS or not, they may have obtained an increase in funding, or they may have received a cut in funding depending on their performance. Nominees, however, HAD to receive a minimum increase of \$ 5,000 a year in their Discovery Grant. That meant that the Committee had to allocate to 15 applicants a total of \$ 75,000 in order to nominate them for the DAS competition, in the face of a budget cut for returning applicants. Because at the end of Competition Week the Committee had overshot its budget, most successful applicants saw their DG cut by 1.5% to balance the budget, with the exception of those awarded the minimum \$ 15,000 grant and those that received a \$ 5,000 increase to make them eligible for the DAS competition. It appears that of 15 nominees from GSC 18, 7 received a DAS.

GSC 18 wrote a letter to NSERC vice-president Isabelle Blain expressing concern about the new CREATE program, that may reduce the amount of funding for the established and highly successful scholarship and fellowship programs. The Committee

unanimously agreed that additional funds should be allocated to the current programs, and pointed out that many objectives of the CREATE program duplicate those of established scholarship and fellowship programs. This new program may eventually draw more funds away from fundamental research.

*Marco Festa-Bianchet*, CSEE Council member and GSC 18 member

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

### Lunch-Workshop

Our first annual lunch-workshop was a great success with 130 of our members participating! I would like to thank Daniel Promislow, Elizabeth Elle and Marc-André Lachance for participating on the discussion panel, as well as Daniel Promislow for his wonderful presentation on “Searching for and landing a job: How to get prepared for academia”. There will be another lunch-workshop at next year’s meeting in Halifax that will be focusing on non-academic jobs. Please send me any suggestions you may have for future workshop topics at [nathalie-n.brodeur.1@ulaval.ca](mailto:nathalie-n.brodeur.1@ulaval.ca)

### Post-doctoral web page and volunteering opportunities

Based on the feedback I have received from CSEE members, I would create a web page where post-doctoral members may find useful information, for example, posting advice/personal experience when negotiating for a job position, or any other work-related advice. I am looking for volunteers who would be willing to help me set this web page up. I

would also like to take this opportunity to invite all CSEE student and post-doctoral members who would like to volunteer in helping at meetings or helping me on projects that may arise during the year to send me their email address and a short message in the text saying that they would like to be added to the “CSEE Volunteer Group”. This email group will be contacted when council is looking for volunteers, and this list will be given to the local organising committee for each CSEE meeting.

### Nomination process

I have received questions concerning the nomination process for the student/post-doctoral council representative position. Please refer to the following link for more information on the nomination process in Article 4 of the CSEE constitution: <http://www.ecoevo.ca/en/constitution.htm>

Note that you can self-nominate for a councillor position and that it is possible for more than one student/post-doc to be elected.

I would like to thank all the members who have sent me constructive comments and would encourage those who may have comments or questions to email me.

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

## **CSEE and COSEWIC**

An objective of the CSEE is to communicate scientific advice to decision makers. One vehicle for the provision of such advice is COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada). COSEWIC is Canada’s national science advisory body on

species at risk. Its primary responsibility is to undertake status assessments of species at risk of extinction in Canada and to communicate those assessments to Canadian society, to government jurisdictions, and, in the form of advice, to the federal Minister of the Environment. The advice provided to the Environment Minister, communicated by COSEWIC in an Annual Report, formally initiates a process that terminates with a listing decision by a subcommittee of the federal cabinet (Governor in Council).

There are two primary means by which CSEE members can participate in this process. The first is by becoming a member of one of COSEWIC’s ten Species Specialist Subcommittees (SSCs). Each SSC comprises 10-12 members, resulting in 100-120 potential positions. Calls for Membership (4-year terms) on SSCs are posted annually on the COSEWIC web site ([www.cosewic.gc.ca](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca)), usually in October or November. Membership on SSCs is determined by selection committees established by the SSCs, and the competition results are then communicated to COSEWIC.

The second means of participating is by applying to be a member of COSEWIC. Membership for CSEE members would come in one of two forms. There are 20 SSC Co-Chair positions (each subcommittee is headed by 2 Co-Chairs) and 3 Non-Government Science (NGS) Member positions. Calls for Membership for SSC Co-Chairs and NGS Members are typically posted ([www.cosewic.gc.ca](http://www.cosewic.gc.ca)) in January or early February. Based on recommendations made by selection committees, COSEWIC nominates the successful applicants for membership on COSEWIC. These

nominations are received by the federal Minister of the Environment who, in due course, issues Ministerial Appointments (4-year terms) to the nominees to be members of COSEWIC.

If you would like additional information on membership on COSEWIC or its subcommittees, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

*Jeff Hutchings*, Chair, Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada

### **CCAC Update**

The Canadian Council on Animal Care will hold a forum in Ottawa on October 3, 2008, to examine developing trends in animal use in science, discuss how to improve its various programs and seek input for its next 5-year-plan. If your work involves animals, you know what an important effect CCAC rules have on your ability to function as a scientist and educator. If you were invited to attend the forum, please do so. Many of you will also have received a questionnaire distributed by NSERC on behalf of the CCAC. Please respond to it, as it is important that the concerns of ecologists and evolutionary biologists be voiced to the CCAC.

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

450 delegates attended this year's meeting of the CSEE in Vancouver, which offered a wide range of activities, including:

- 216 contributed talks
- 80 contributed posters
- 3 symposia (with 23 additional talks)
- 1 public seminar (Dr. Ian Stirling)
- 3 receptions (opening reception; poster reception; and a reception at the Aquarium)
- 3 workshops (Symposium for Women entering Ecology and Evolution Today; Mesquite Workshop; How to Land a Job in Academia)
- 2 NSERC presentations (one for students/post-docs, one regarding recent reports)
- Representatives of 9 publishing companies (Roberts & Co, Sinauer, Chicago, Wiley-Blackwell, Royal Society, Princeton University Press, PLoS, Oxford, Springer) and one radio tracking company (Holohil)

The meeting, including coffee breaks and lunches, took place in the same venue (Woodward, UBC), which was an excellent way to ensure interactions among members. Attendees spoke highly of the quality of the presentations. We also heard that students found the meeting a welcoming place to present their research and that there were more interactions between students and faculty than at other larger meetings.

We are grateful to our excellent cohort of volunteers, who ensured that everything ran smoothly. Thanks also to everybody who purchased items at the auction, which earned nearly \$3000 for travel awards for next year's meeting. Despite the low registration cost for members, the meeting generated approximately \$20,000 in revenue, which will be returned to Council for future travel grants, symposia, workshops, awards, etc.

### **Student Awards at the Vancouver meetings**

The Council of the CSEE awarded prizes for excellent student presentations to:

#### *Best Talk:*

1. Rowan Barrett (University of British Columbia) - \$500
2. Nathaniel Sharp (University of Toronto) - \$300
3. Leithen M'Gonigle (University of British Columbia) - \$200

#### *Best Poster*

1. Simon Goring (Simon Fraser University) - \$500
2. Katy Hind (University of New Brunswick) - \$300
3. Melissa Cuke (University of British Columbia) - \$200

Annals of Botany are pleased to award the:

#### *Best Student Presentation in Botany*

- Antonina Internicola (University of Lausanne) - \$200

Finally, the bioGENESIS core project of DIVERSITAS is pleased to present the following awards for students working in the area of Evolutionary Applications:

#### *Evolutionary Applications Awards*

- Michelle Franklin (University of British Columbia) - \$500
- Darren Johnson (Oregon State University) - \$500
- Melanie Dionne (Université Laval) - \$500

The quality of the presentations at the CSEE 2008 meetings in Vancouver was superb, and the judges found it difficult to choose the prize winners. We thank the numerous volunteers from across the country who agreed to judge these presentations. Congratulations to all!

*Sally Otto*, Secretary CSEE

**Carbon Offsets:** We are pleased to announce that over \$1000 was collected and donated to Offsetters ([www.offsetters.ca](http://www.offsetters.ca)) to offset the carbon costs of the Vancouver meeting. This offsets 52.7 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### **CSEE and GSC Joint Meeting, Dalhousie University, May 13-17, 2009**

The annual meeting of the Canadian Society for Ecology and Evolution will be held in conjunction with the Genetics Society of Canada at Dalhousie University, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. We will open with an evening

reception on May 13 followed by three full days of talks (May 14 – 16).

Information about the meeting will be available at <http://www.ecoevo.ca/> where you can find the latest program information, book a residence, and register online. We are currently considering symposia topics and plenary speakers so please send proposals or suggestions. Current symposia topics include a symposium to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Darwin's oeuvre "On the Origin of Species", and highlights of the results of International Polar Year research.

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 (and genetics) across the country. To help us plan, *please register early*.

Registration fees and housing costs will go up after March 31st, which is also the deadline for abstract submission.

Local Organizing Committee: Sina Adl (Co-chair, Dalhousie), Tamara Romanuk (Co-chair, Dalhousie), Jeremy Lundholm (St. Mary's University), Ron MacKay (Mount Saint Vincent University), Brian Starzomski (Post-doc, Dalhousie), and Marta Coll (Post-doc, Dalhousie)

We hope you will all plan to attend!

Sina Adl (sادل@dal.ca) et Tamara Romanuk (romanuk@dal.ca)

## CSEE 2010 Fifth Annual Meeting, Québec

It is with great pleasure that we invite you to attend the CSEE fifth annual meeting, which will be held from 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> May 2010, in Québec, QC. No need to elaborate, but suffice it to say that 400 year old Québec is of unequalled historical and cultural heritage interest, with its architecture, pedestrian streets and fortifications, unique in North America. The meeting will be officially hosted by Université Laval: its main campus where the meeting will take place is located approximately 10km from the « Vieux Québec », which is very easily accessible by public transport. Keeping in line with what is becoming a standard for CSEE, we propose a three full-day meeting from Monday 10<sup>th</sup> through Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup>, with an opening reception on Sunday evening of the 9<sup>th</sup>. As for previous meetings also, the Québec meeting will feature a mixture of plenary talks, symposia, targeted workshops, and general talk and poster sessions. The following CSEE members will compose the LOC: Louis Bernatchez, Stéphane Boudreau, Nathalie Brodeur, Steeve Côté, and Julie Turgeon from Université Laval, Nadia Aubin-Orth and Christian Landry from Université de Montréal, and Spencer Barrett (CSEE council representative). Book these dates to your agenda now! We are all looking forward to hosting you in Québec in 2010.

*À bientôt...*

Louis Bernatchez, Treasurer CSEE

## CALL FOR NOMINATIONS FOR CSEE COUNCIL

Several replacements are required for the CSEE Council for 2010. Please send the names of potential individuals that would be suitably qualified for these important positions to VP Spencer Barrett ([barrett@eeb.utoronto.ca](mailto:barrett@eeb.utoronto.ca)) by October 1, 2008. Any member of the society can be nominated. The positions are:

- 1) Vice President (2010-2011)
- 2) Treasurer (2010-2013)
- 3) Three Regular Council Members (2010-2014)
- 4) One Student Councilor (2010-2011)

Students or post-doctoral fellows can be Regular Council Members. The Student Councilor has special responsibility for student affairs.

### EDITOR'S NOTES

This Newsletter is a vehicle to disseminate news and information to members of the CSEE. I thank all those that contributed to this issue and Méli<sup>s</sup>sa Lieutenant-Gosselin for translations. The Newsletter is sent by e-mail to all members and can be downloaded from the CSEE's web page ([www.ecoevo.ca](http://www.ecoevo.ca)).

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)

### COUNCIL

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)

Louis Bernatchez (Université Laval, Treasurer/Trésorier)

Beatrix Beisner (Université du Québec à Montréal; Council member 2006 – 2009/ Membre du Conseil)

Marco Festa-Bianchet (Université de Sherbrooke; Council member 2006 – 2009/ Membre du Conseil)

Mark Forbes (Carleton University; Council member 2006 – 2009/ Membre du Conseil)

Andrew Hendry (McGill University; Council member 2008 – 2011/ Membre du Conseil)

Kathy Martin (University of British Columbia; Council member 2008 – 2011/ Membre du Conseil)

Sean Rogers (University of British Columbia; Council member 2008 – 2011/ Membre du Conseil)

Nathalie Brodeur (Université Laval; Student/Post-doc Council member 2008-2009/ Membre aux études/postdoc du conseil)