

British & Irish Region Newsletter — December 2008



Byron enjoys an unexpected encounter with a Kaka, the New Zealand bush parrot, on a recent visit to the island of Kapiti.

President's corner

At the AGM on November 26th, outgoing President David Balding argued that the International Biometric Society remains the appropriate scientific society for many of us today, providing a context and environment for our work. It has nurtured and encouraged the careers of many statisticians in the past, and our challenge is to ensure this continues.

A President's two-year term is very short. Thus I'd like to hear from members, as soon as possible, about your views on how the Region might develop. For instance, should we again try some of the ideas for meetings that have worked well in the past? We used to have a Summer Meeting, when we visited a particular scientific establishment and learned at first hand the work taking place there; we sometimes also had meetings when younger members of the society gave talks on their research work, resulting in a great variety of topics being covered.

The inaugural meeting of the Region was held 60 years ago, in London. Many current meetings are also held in London; is it now time to have meetings elsewhere, as we have at various times in the past? How can the Society best serve your interests? Please email me at: B.J.T.Morgan@kent.ac.uk.

Finally, I am pleased to express our gratitude and appreciation to David Balding for all of his work on behalf of the Region and the Society as a whole over the past two years of his Presidency.

Subscriptions due

Peter Rigsby writes: Subscriptions for 2009 are due on 1st January 2009.

A separate invoice sheet at the end of the newsletter (p. 8) gives full details of the current subscription rates. For those who wish to pay by cheque, the form should be completed and returned to the address shown.

Following the decision at the AGM, full members who pay by

standing order should note that the rate has been reduced to £40 and any standing order instruction should be changed with their bank: over-payments will be given to the bursary fund.

Membership of the Biometrics Society is now cheaper than any other statistical society in the UK — a good time to encourage colleagues to join!

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Annual General Meeting 2008



Sara Geneletti writes: The 2008 AGM was held at St Mary's Campus, Imperial College London. The agenda included the BIR Secretary's, Treasurer's and Membership Secretary's reports (see pages 2-3). The latter was the last report from Suzanne Clarke (Rothamsted Research), who is stepping down after 7 years and making way for Diana Cole (University of Kent). The Treasurer's report showed that the BIR finances were in excellent shape with just over twenty thousand pounds in the kitty. The Membership report showed an increase from last year, partly due to students who took advantage of the Fisher Memorial bursaries to go to IBC. In the light of the surplus, David Balding (outgoing regional President) moved that full membership subscriptions be reduced from £45 to £40. He suggested this would encourage people to retain their membership, and was consistent with the committee's view that the popular scientific meetings (often attended by many non-members) should not be supported from subscriptions. After some discussion, this was passed. Last but by no

means least, the AGM elected John Whittaker (London School of Hygiene) and Adele Marshall (Queen's University Belfast) to the committee and warmly welcomed the incoming British and Irish Region President, Byron Morgan.

Secretary's corner

JAMES.CARPENTER@LSHTM.AC.UK

As I reported at the AGM, this year has been excellent for the BIR: hosting a superb international conference in Dublin, three stimulating scientific meetings, and 44 new members.

The success of the international conference in Dublin, with over 900 participants, owes much to the tireless work of Andrew Mead and we are very grateful for his enthusiasm and energy. Thanks are also due to other BIR members who worked to make the meeting a success. On the local organising committee, John Hinde (chair), Gabrielle Kelly, Adele Marshall, Patrick Murphy, John Whittaker and Angela Wood. On the scientific committee, David Balding and Andrew Mead. Abstracts and reports from the meeting can be found on the IBS website (<http://www.tibs.org>) and some informal feedback on the meeting is in our past regional newsletters (<http://www.britishandirish.tibs.org/live/>). Once again we thank the Fisher Memorial Trust for their support of the bursary scheme, from which 11 BIR members benefited.

We have held three scientific meetings this year: Dosing and formulation studies (organised by Steve Gilmour; joint with RSS general applications section); Issues & models for competing risks studies (organised by Bianca DeStavola; joint with RSS medical section) and Recent developments in genetic epidemiology (organised by David Balding, joint with the South of England Genetic Epidemiology Group). While all were joint meetings, the committee members concerned took the lead in all cases which often involved a non-trivial amount of work. Thanks are due to them. Plans for our Spring meeting can be found on page 3.

One of the committee's ongoing concerns is recruiting and retaining members. To this end, over the last year we have:

1. Re-vamped the regional newsletter. This is the main point of contact with members, and the more interesting and relevant it is the better. The new format has been well received (the newsletter was the most popular take-away item from the IBS stand at the Dublin conference), but we are still looking for more people to send in material and write short articles.

2. Continued lobbying at the international level for the option of 'membership with electronic only access to Biometrics and/or JABES'—with a corresponding reduced subscription. The committee believes this makes sense in an era when many only access the journal online through their institutions. We have made progress in this area, but this is still not resolved.
3. A new regional website—see page 6.
4. Ensuring the scientific meetings break even, and thus avoiding as far as possible using members' subscriptions to subsidise meetings. This is because many meeting attendees are nonmembers, and because we feel it is often possible to reclaim meeting fees, e.g. from a grant, whereas subscriptions often come from members' own pockets.
5. Started exploring creating an informal internet network for student members, where they can keep in touch.

We are particularly fortunate that we have reasonable reserves, so we can invest in some of these initiatives. Nevertheless, before doing so the committee will be careful to look for good value for money.

I, and the committee, are always keen to hear from members about what they would like the society to be doing (or what it is doing now that it shouldn't be doing): do feel free to email me (james.carpenter@lshtm.ac.uk). The committee are working to make the BIR relevant and attractive, because we believe it has an important role to play in bringing together statisticians working in environmental, agricultural, biological and medical applications—but we need your input, and help in encouraging new members to take up and retain membership.

Finally, it is a pleasure to thank David for his leadership of the region over the last two years: I have greatly enjoyed working with him. It is also a pleasure to welcome Byron Morgan as the incoming regional president. Byron has been involved with the IBS for many years and is a past president of the international society (1996–97). His commitment and wisdom will be very welcome.

Regional seminars: reminder

James Carpenter

Members are reminded that the committee is keen to support regional seminars, and invites proposals.

Speakers should be suitably distinguished (i.e. not just a regular academic department seminar) and the seminar at a time/place that a good number of IBS/BIR members are likely to attend. Normally we'd expect the host or-

ganisation to make a contribution as well, but we would contribute by advertising the event and perhaps hosting some networking event like paying for the teas & coffees or subsidising a lunch for members, or making a contribution to the speaker's expenses. There is an upper limit of £100 for any one seminar. ■

Summary of Membership Secretary's Report

Sara Geneletti



DIANA COLE, INCOMING MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

The last report from Suzanne Clark, outgoing Membership Secretary, was encouraging, with a net increase in membership of 11 paid up members from 252 last year to 263. A number of new members were students who had joined in order to take advantage of the Fisher Memorial Bursaries to go to IBC. Hopefully, they will remain for 2009.

Overall, there were 44 new memberships, (12 full, 7 associate and 25 student). Un-

fortunately, 7 members resigned and 9 were removed as they had not paid fees for 2 years. There are an additional 45 people on the local mailing list who have not paid for < 2 years; we hope they will be encouraged to retain their membership now the annual subscription has been reduced. Suzanne's full report can be found in the AGM area of the regional website.

The AGM expressed its thanks to Suzanne Clark for her 7 years dedicated work as membership secretary, and warmly welcomed Diana Cole from the University of Kent as her successor.

Diana's email address is D.J.Cole@kent.ac.uk, and details of change of address *etc.* should now be sent to Diana rather than Suzanne. ■

ISEC satellite meeting to the IBC in Dublin



One of the satellite meetings to the IBC in Dublin was the International Statistical Ecology Conference (ISEC), organised by the National Centre for Statistical Ecology, and held in St. Andrews university during the week prior to Dublin. There were over 200 participants, and the next such meeting will be held in Canterbury from the 6th–9th July, 2010.

The picture shows, from the left, Len Thomas, Ken Burnham and Byron Morgan. Shrouded behind Ken is a poster celebrating his many important works in biometry, which was unveiled at the meeting, and presented to him. The poster can be viewed on the Wildlife Society's newsletter, in which it was published on the last page; see: http://joomla.wildlife.org/Biometrics/images/documents/bwg_august_2008.pdf ■

NEXT MEETING: WED 6TH MAY, CENTRAL SCIENCE LABORATORY, YORK

Current Issues in Cost Benefit Analysis

Alistair Murray

This meeting aims to address current issues in analysing cost-benefit data, drawing out the key statistical issues from applications in agriculture, medicine and the environment.

Speakers will include Dr Graham Smith (Central Science Laboratory, York) on cost-benefit analysis of management of badgers in the 'cattle-badger-tuberculosis' system,

and Dr Richard Grieve (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) on issues arising in cost-benefit analyses of cluster randomised controlled trials.

The meeting will be hosted by the Central Science Laboratory, Sand Hutton, York, with registration from 10.30am; the final session will end at 4.30pm.

Please book the date, and alert colleagues who may be interested. ■

Future meetings

James Carpenter

Meetings on the following topics are in the pipeline for 2009–10:

- June-July 09, London: Design issues for Population Analysis/Non-linear Mixed Effects Models;
- September-October 09, Edinburgh: Current challenges in statistical modelling of agricultural and

medical data;

- November-December 09: the 1000 genome project, and
- June 2010, London: Prognostic Modelling.

Ideas for meetings and suggestions for speakers are always welcome—please email James in the first instance. ■

REPORT ON OCTOBER MEETING

Issues and models for competing risks

Felicity Clemens

The meeting took place on 7th October at the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) in London, jointly with the RSS medical section. It was well attended with around 70 participants from universities nationwide, the pharmaceutical industry, consultancy and regulatory bodies. Five presentations were given about modelling competing risks: an overview of the issues surrounding modelling medical outcomes with competing risks, presentation of a new approach modelling competing risks, an application of multistate modelling, an extension of modelling methods to delayed entry studies, and an application of competing risks methodology to a non-inferiority trial.

The speakers were Professor Per Kragh Andersen of the Department of Biostatistics, University of Copenhagen, one of whose research interests is the modelling of competing risks data in cohort studies, Dr Hein Putter of Leiden University Medical Center who is interested in the application of multi-state modelling to survival analysis, Professor Abdel Babiker who is Associate Director of the MRC Clinical Trials Unit based in London, Dr Ronald Geskus of the Academic Medical Center, Amsterdam, who has research interests in survival analysis in HIV cohort studies, and Dr Ruwanthi Kolamunnage-Dona of the Centre for Medical Statistics and Health Evaluation at the University of Liverpool whose research interests include longitudinal and survival data analysis.

Professor Andersen gave an overview of the problems of analysing competing risks data. Competing events can be seen as a multi-state problem where the outcome of interest can be one of several possible outcomes, any one of which prevents the occurrence of the others. Because this situation is incompatible with the traditional assumptions of survival analysis, new measures such as cumulative incidence (the probability of failing from the cause of interest in the next short time interval conditional on survival from all causes so far) are used to represent the risk of failure from a given cause. Complex methods are required to model cumulative incidence and interpret the results. Dr

Putter introduced a new type of competing risks model which produces cumulative failures by combining relative hazard and an estimated probability of the cause of death.

Some of the speakers demonstrated data handling methods that allow current approaches to be used in unusual situations. Dr Geskus extended current methods for regression on cumulative incidences by showing that that data for individuals who have suffered a competing event can be reweighted by the inverse probability of left truncation to treat them as though they are in the risk set. Professor Babiker used data augmentation with sampling weights and a random-effects model for standard errors to analyse cumulative incidences in a cohort study with clustering. Dr Kolamunnage-Dona demonstrated the use of a joint model for time to failure and a longitudinal drug dosing process with an EM algorithm for estimation.

Applications were demonstrated across a range of types of studies. Dr Kolamunnage-Dona looked at a non-inferiority trial for anti-epileptic medication where competing events were inadequate seizure control and unacceptable adverse events, demonstrating that dosing differences between the drugs did not alter the finding of non-inferiority. Dr Putter looked at a surgical trial comparing two different methods of surgical dissection for gastric cancer patients, demonstrating that a time-dependent treatment effect in this situation could in fact be an artifact of the cause-specific treatment effects. Professor Babiker examined the epidemiological problem of reasons for women's discontinuation of the use of oral contraception; the rate of contraceptive failure was found to be very high compared to usual rates of failure, especially for rural women. Dr Geskus looked at time to AIDS in a genetic HIV cohort study.

Overall the afternoon managed to cover a large amount of theoretical and practical ground. This was my first IBS meeting and I found it a great overview of a complex topic, lots of stimulating ideas and interesting discussion following each presentation. A really informative way of spend-

ing an afternoon and much more fun than the office—the sandwiches weren't bad either! I'll definitely be back for more next time!

Slides from this meeting can be downloaded from the meeting archive at <http://www.britishandirish.tibs.org/live/>. ■

REPORT ON NOVEMBER MEETING

Issues in Genetic Epidemiology

James Carpenter

Around 100 people attended this meeting, organised by David Balding jointly with the Southern England Genetic Epidemiology Group (SEGEG), which followed the AGM on 26th November.

The meeting began with David's presidential address, which is traditionally given by the regional president at the end of their two year term of office. His talk, entitled 'kinship-based linear mixed models for population association' opened with a review of the issues facing genetic epidemiology, and then described work carried out with his PhD student Will Astle showing the potential gains of using linear mixed models for kinship relationships. The approach was illustrated with data on the train-ability of

guide dogs.

Next, Chris Holmes (University of Oxford) described joint work with his PhD student Christopher Yau on new algorithms for analysing copy-number-variation from genome-wide SNP arrays. After tea, Cathryn Lewis (Kings College London) discussed the practical implications of using genetic information to predict an individual's risk of developing Crohn's disease. Lastly, Antonis Antoniou (University of Cambridge) presented recent developments in risk prediction models for familial breast cancer.

The meeting finished with a stimulating discussion. Meeting slides will be available on the BIR website early in the new year. ■

Reflections from the outgoing president

David Balding

It has been my pleasure to lead the IBS-BIR committee over the past 2 years, in what has been a successful period for us: many interesting and well-attended scientific meetings, with the highlight of course being the IBC in Dublin, and a sound financial position. Internationally the Society continues to succeed on many fronts: it is in a much improved situation financially, in large part thanks to the successful marketing of the journals via institutional online access agreements. The only dark cloud on this otherwise pleasant vista is that membership, both in the BIR and the internationally, continues a longterm downward trend, albeit with some promising signs in the current year.

On taking over the BIR presidency two years ago, I saw two main objectives that I wanted to work towards. I saw the biggest problem underlying the decline in membership as being that members perceive the subscription fee as mainly to pay for a paper copy of *Biometrics*, which is superfluous for many of us because we have free online access through our institutions. I really wanted to divorce membership from journal subscription entirely, but seeing that as unachievable I have tried through my role on council to work towards at least allowing a reduced membership fee for online-only access to one of our two journals. This would at least remove the perception that members are paying unnecessarily for postage and printing costs.

Sadly this hasn't yet occurred, but after much discussion in Council I am hopeful that it will be approved during 2009, in time for 2010 subscriptions.

My other goal was to work towards better integration between the BIR and the Royal Statistical Society. Many BIR members are also RSS Fellows; it is a much bigger organisation than us (they have more than 20 times our membership, though this includes many from outside the UK), and unlike us they have permanent offices and a substantial professional staff. I saw advantages for both our memberships, in closer integration of the administration of the two Societies, while retaining our distinct identities. Unfortunately despite several approaches over two years I have received little response from the RSS; this is a shame, but not a serious setback as we continue to hold successful joint scientific meetings on friendly terms.

Despite not achieving either of these two goals, I remain happy that the Society continues to advance scientifically, and there have been some changes for the better in how we run ourselves. In particular, your committee has moved in the direction of transferring our fundraising away from subscriptions and towards attendance fees for scientific meetings. In the current climate of declining interest in membership, yet increasing interest in attending our meetings, this seems to me a sensible move, and should bring advantages to many members who can get

reimbursed for meeting expenses more easily than they can get reimbursed for annual subscriptions. Thus I am very pleased that our finances are sufficiently strong that we can afford to reduce our full membership subscription from £45 to £40 per year. If, as I hope, Council approves reduced rate membership for online-only subscriptions, we should be able to maintain this low rate for many years, at least for online-only subscribers; if not, the lower rate should still be sustainable for several years.

I thank my colleagues on the committee for their hard

work, in particular Andrew Mead and then James Carpenter as Secretary, Peter Rigsby as Treasurer and Peter Colman as web officer, responsible for recent great improvements to the regional website, with more to come next year. Many thanks to outgoing membership secretary Suzanne Clark for her seven years of service, and welcome to her replacement Diana Cole. Finally, congratulations and best wishes to incoming president, Byron Morgan, who is approaching his new post with many ideas and much energy. ■

Re-launch of Regional Website

Peter Colman, Pfizer Global Research & Development (01304 648186 · peter.colman@pfizer.com)

The British and Irish Region of IBS has long had a web-site of its own. This was set up and capably managed by Rosemary Bailey until late 2007, when the responsibility passed to me. Since the web-site was established both the acceptance by people of web-sites in general and, now, the expectation of what web-sites should offer, have grown dramatically. With this in mind, the regional committee agreed earlier this year to a simple strategy for developing the web-site. Since then, a number of activities have taken place behind the scenes, the results of which I hope you will have noticed. The site is now hosted on the web-servers at the IBS Business Office, rather than in Rosemary's personal web space at Queen Mary. This led to a new url: <http://www.britishandirish.tibs.org/live> *Please be sure to note this, bookmark it, use it and publicise it!* More recently, we concluded giving the site a makeover and face-lift. As is the way with such matters, nothing fundamental has changed, but we hope that the site is more attractive to potential new members and that you can find what you want relatively easily.

We're now moving into the next stage of the strategy. This revolves around the idea that the web-site will in the future be a primary source of information for members, updated as information becomes available, acting as a 'one-stop shop'. Our next steps are to identify the functionality which will benefit members the most, to specify these in detail and to cost-out their implementation.

"www.britishandirish.tibs.org..MEMORABLE?"
NO! So please give me better ideas, which might be remembered or even guessed! Email them to peter.colman@pfizer.com by 5:00 pm (GMT) on 16th Jan 2009: the best will receive a £10 Amazon gift voucher.

We have some ideas already about the types of things that we could deliver in the new website; but what we really need are your views on what you would like to be able to find or do at the regional web-site. So, early in the new year, you can expect to receive a questionnaire seeking your views. We don't want to spend regional funds on something technologically exciting which nobody wants or nobody is able to use! Once we have settled on the spec and obtained costings, the committee will decide upon the final spec and seek a suitable professional web-site builder to implement it. You may wonder why we expect to be paying good money for something that has previously been done by a volunteer using a simple text editor in their spare time. Briefly, in order to implement the sorts of improvements that we envisage, we need to hire expertise in new technologies to get us up and running. The requirement is that the site is then easily maintained by members of the society without any skills other than being able to complete an on-line form and click on a button.

What sort of things might you find on the new site? This will be driven by your responses, but we are already thinking of on-line registration (and payment) for meetings, on-line payment of membership fees, the ability to subscribe to updates (RSS feeds), the ability to discuss biometrics-related topics in a members-only area and so on. We want to make the web-site a 'one-stop shop' which makes available to members up to date information on the activities of the region and enables members to get more value from their membership fee. So, it will be up to you to say what you would like. With, of course, the proviso, that we may not be able to implement every suggestion!

Please visit <http://www.britishandirish.tibs.org/live> and get a feel for the new look. Do let me know if something doesn't work or is missing. I don't claim that everything is perfect and, as with every web-site, it is always 'under construction'! And, be ready to respond to the questionnaire that should reach you early in the new year. ■

MEETING: LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE & TROPICAL MEDICINE: 16–17TH APRIL 2009

Forty years of the LSHTM MSc Medical Statistics

James Carpenter

To celebrate 40 years of the MSc Medical Statistics at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, a 2-day meeting is planned for 16-17 April.

Online registration is currently open at <http://www.lshtm.ac.uk/msu/anniversary.htm>, where further details can be found. The cost is £100, including food and

a celebration on the Thursday evening. This will be the first meeting to be held in the School's new suite of lecture theatres. The provisional programme is available online, and amongst other distinguished speakers, we are delighted that Scott Zeger is coming to deliver the Bradford-Hill memorial lecture. ■

6–9 APRIL 2009, GHENT, BELGIUM

Channel Network Conference

James Carpenter

Plans are now well advanced for the 2nd Channel Network Conference, 6–9 April 2009, Ghent, Belgium. Full details can be found at <http://www.cvstat.ugent.be/ibs/>, but special dates to note are:

- Abstract submission deadline : January 15, 2009
- Early registration deadline : February 15, 2009
- Final registration deadline : March 15, 2009

The keynote speaker is Thomas Schiex, and the programme includes invited sessions on

- Biological vs. statistical interaction
 - Sir David Cox

- Anders Skrondal
- Tyler VanderWeele

- Mixture models and growth curves

- Mario Cortina Borja
- Richard Silverwood
- Stef van Buuren

- Multivariate Survival Analysis

- Alioum Ahmadou
- Robin Henderson
- Hans van Houwelingen

together with contributed oral and poster sessions. ■

In Brief

More help wanted

Sara and James are keen for more volunteers to help with the newsletter.

Please consider sending in news, writing the odd article, setting a puzzle: it's not a major commitment!

Archives

The early history of the Society is in an archive housed by the Royal Statistical Society. It is now time to carefully go through more recent material, archiving that of enduring interest. The committee is keen to hear from anyone who would be interested in helping with this task:

please email James in the first instance.

Wikis

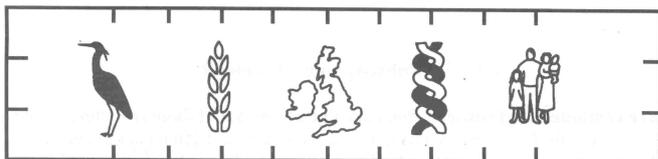
Following an encouraging response from student members, a student members' *Wiki* will be set up early in 2009.

Share me with your colleagues!

Please share this newsletter with your colleagues—and encourage them to join by filling out the subscription form overleaf, and writing 'new member' on the bottom of the form.

Copy Deadline for next issue: Monday March 2nd
Production: James Carpenter & Sara Geneletti

Happy Christmas and Best Wishes for 2009



**INTERNATIONAL
BIOMETRIC SOCIETY
(British & Irish Region)**

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2009

Subscriptions for the year commencing 1st January 2009 are now due. If you do not pay by standing order, please arrange for a cheque for the appropriate amount to be sent to the Regional Treasurer:

Peter Rigsby
National Institute for Biological Standards and Control
Blanche Lane
South Mimms
Potters Bar
Hertfordshire
EN6 3QG

Rates (please tick the rate applicable for your membership category):

- Full membership (£40 / € 50)
- Associate membership (£15 / € 20)
- Student membership (£15 / € 20)

Please make cheques payable to 'BIOMETRIC SOCIETY' and include this form with your payment.

Name

Address

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