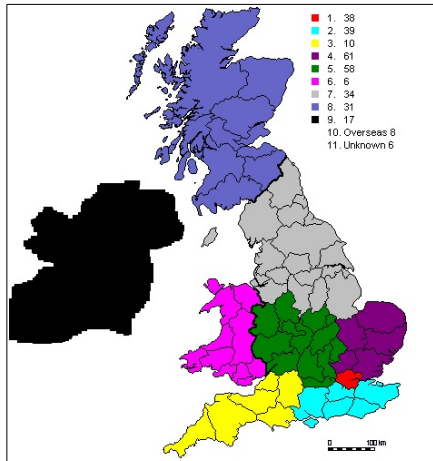




## British & Irish Region Newsletter — March 2009

### Distribution of BIR members



Distribution of BIR members

*Sara Geneletti writes:* The British and Irish Region of the International Biometric Society was founded in 1948 by eminent statisticians and biologists of the time, including R. A. Fisher and J. B. S. Haldane. We currently have around 300 members, making us the fourth largest of the 14 regions of the IBS (after East North America, Germany and West North America). BIR members hail from many disciplines: agriculture, environment, epidemiology, genetics, biotechnology, mathematics, statistics and others (see table). The map alongside the article, (prepared by Diana Cole) shows the distribution of members in the United Kingdom and Ireland. The committee is keen to organise meetings throughout the UK. Forthcoming meetings are planned in York (May) and Edinburgh (June). The map highlights that there are relatively few members in Ireland, despite Dublin hosting the international conference in 2008. Nevertheless, the committee are keen to hold a meeting, or sponsor a seminar, in Ireland, and invite proposals from members. Contact james.carpenter@lshtm.ac.uk in the first instance.

BIR members' primary application area:

Bio-tech	Epi-Med	Env-Agri	Maths-Stats	Pharma	other
18	70	24	97	14	90

### Forthcoming meetings

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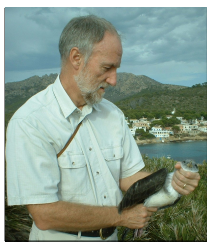
- 1. Cost Benefit Analysis: current perspectives and future directions**  
Wed 8th May, 10.30am–4.30pm, Lakeside Conference Centre, Central Science Laboratory, York. See page 2.
- 2. Darwin bicentenary meeting**  
Wed 3rd June, 12.00pm–4.00pm, Down House, Kent. *We are lim-*

*ited to 25 participants, so registration will be on a first come first served basis. See page 3.*

- 3. Seminar on Statistical Ecology**  
Recent work by young biometricians. Fri 19th June, 2-5pm, Pollock Halls, Edinburgh. See page 3.

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### President's corner



The new Membership Secretary, Diana Cole inherited a survey of members of the Region taken several years ago; one of the questions asked related to location of meetings, and several contrasting views were received. The location of members, shown in the map above, indicates that London is an obvious venue for meetings of the Region. However, for the immediate future we shall be outside London, with meetings in Ghent in April, York in May, and Kent and Edinburgh in June. As with the medical statistics meeting in January, we shall endeavour in the future to place talk slides on the Regional web-site, so that all members of the Region can be aware of meeting talks, even if they are not able to be present in person.

Once again we were able to offer sponsorship to attend the Channel Network Conference and it is a pleasure to congratulate Mouna Akacha on the award of a travel bursary to attend the Channel Network meeting in Ghent.

Our Summer meeting will take place in Down House, in the 200th anniversary year of Darwin's birth. This promises to be a special day out — please book the date. More details on page 3.

The Regional Committee met last week, and one item on the Agenda was the institution of a Regional prize for new biometricians. Other regions of the Society already have such a prize, and we see it as a way to encourage and reward career-young members of the Region. This is one of a number of exciting developments in the pipeline.

*The picture is of Byron holding a Cory's shearwater on an island off Majorca*

# Causal inference: State-of-the-Art

Sara Geneletti



From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of March I attended a workshop on causal inference at the Centre for Mathematical Sciences in Cambridge. It was organised by L. Bernardinelli, C. Berzuini and P. Dawid. Interest in the area of causal inference has been steadily growing over the last few years and this was evident in the variety of speakers and the number of participants. I had a very interesting time and I came away more excited and overwhelmed by the task ahead than before! Every speaker seemed to have their own spin on what the role of causal inference was and how to go about it. Some of the questions asked were: Are graphi-

cal models useful or are they dangerous? Should we define causal effects in terms of potential responses or in terms of interventions? Are instrumental variable methods based on Mendelian randomisation a good way of understanding the effects of life-style risk factors such as alcohol consumption or diet? Most important of all, how can we start formulating causal questions in such a way that causal inference becomes an explicit part of epidemiologic studies and not something implied in the results and conclusions section of a paper? While these questions are unlikely to be answered any time soon, it was refreshing to air them in an open and friendly environment and I look forward to more equally exciting workshops dealing with this topic. ■

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

## Cost benefit analysis: current perspectives and future directions

Alistair Murray

This meeting, co-organised by the British and Irish region and the Statistics and Informatics team at the Food and Environment Research Agency, aims to bring together researchers in Cost Benefit Analysis in health economics and agri-ecological and environmental science, in order to draw out key methodological themes in cost benefit analysis and encourage cross fertilisation.

Programme:

- 10.30–10.50am, Registration and coffee.
- 11.50–11.00am, Alistair Murray (Food and Environment Research Agency, York). *Welcome, and overview*
- 11.00–12.00pm, Graham Smith (Food and Environment Research Agency, York) *Costs and Benefits of culling Badgers for control of bovine TB*
- 12.00pm–1.00pm Glyn Jones (ADAS Ltd) *To be confirmed*
- 1.00–2.00pm, Lunch
- 2.00–3.00pm, Andrea Manca (Centre for Health Economics, York University) *Cost benefit analysis: why? which? what? – a NICE example*

- 3.00–4.00pm Richard Grieve (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine) *Developing statistical methods in cost effectiveness analysis of health care interventions: where should we focus our energy*
- 4.00–4.30pm, Panel discussion
- 4.30pm, Close

The Lakeside Conference Centre at the Food and Environment Agency is a lovely setting for meetings and is easily accessible by road and rail — see [www.fera.defra.gov.uk/contactUs/howToFindUs.cfm](http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/contactUs/howToFindUs.cfm). For further details of our facilities go to [www.fera.defra.gov.uk/conferenceCentre](http://www.fera.defra.gov.uk/conferenceCentre). Follow the link to ‘Accommodation and travel’ for a list of discounted hotels — you may need to mention that Fera used to be CSL until 1 April to obtain the discounted rate. The meeting is £50 for non-members, £20 for British and Irish Region members and free for students.

Email [James.Carpenter@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:James.Carpenter@lshtm.ac.uk) to register for this meeting. The cut-off for registrations is Friday 1st May at noon. ■

## SUMMER MEETING, DOWN HOUSE, KENT, WED 3RD JUNE

## Darwin Centenary meeting at Down House

Sara Geneletti



We are delighted that we are able to hold a meeting at Down House, Down, Kent — home of Charles Darwin — on Wed 3rd June. The meeting is free to members. Unfortunately we are limited to 25 participants, and registration will be

on a first come first served basis. To register, email [james.carpenter@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:james.carpenter@lshtm.ac.uk). We will meet at a near by pub for lunch at noon, before making our way to Down House for an informal meeting of about an hour. Following this, we can tour the house, beautiful grounds, and adjacent woodland. If you'd like to give a brief talk on some recent work, let James know. ■

## EDINBURGH MEETING: FRIDAY 19TH JUNE, 2.00–4.30PM

## Topics in Statistical Ecology

Byron Morgan

7 We are delighted to have been able to arrange this meeting, at which four young biometricians will present their work.

Programme:

- 1.45pm Registration
- 2.00pm Byron Morgan (BIR President) *Welcome*
- 2.05–2.35pm Rachel McCrea (University of Kent) *Multi-site mark-recapture model selection using score tests*
- 2.35–3.05pm Lauren Oliver (University of Kent) *Estimating the survival rates of individuals with heterogeneous resighting probabilities: a mark-recapture analysis of the cheetahs of the Serengeti Plains of Tanzania*

- 3.05–3.30pm Tea
- 3.30–4.00pm Lindesay Scott-Hayward (St Andrews University)
- 4.00–4.30pm Angelika Studeny (St Andrews University) *How close is the SAD to perfect evenness? Measuring biodiversity through goodness-of-fit statistics*
- 4.30pm Close

The meeting will be held at St. Leonard's Hall, University of Edinburgh. Directions are at [www.edinburghfirst.com/edinburghfirst/location.asp](http://www.edinburghfirst.com/edinburghfirst/location.asp).

To register, email [B.J.T.Morgan@kent.ac.uk](mailto:B.J.T.Morgan@kent.ac.uk) (Byron Morgan). Registration is free for BIR members, and £25 for non-members. ■

## In Brief

## Website update

The committee are finalising a design brief for the new IBS-BIR website, which should be put to tender in June. The committee also agreed to

recommend we create an executive member responsible for the web-site.

## Archives update

We are delighted to say that Gillian Arnold has

kindly agreed to review the contents of the IBS-BIR archive, currently lodged at the Royal Statistical Society, with a view to adding more recent material.

## Send in your news, please

We want to keep members in touch — so please e-mail James with any news for the next issue.

Copy Deadline for next issue: Monday June 1st

Production: James Carpenter & Sara Geneletti