

International Biometric Society (British and Irish Region)

Secretary's Report, 2006-2007

This is my seventh and final annual report as Secretary of the British and Irish Region of the International Biometric Society. Personally the year has been dominated by additional activities in my role as IBS President-elect, a post to which I was appointed from 1st January 2007. This additional role has resulted in a number of foreign trips during the last 10 months (to Atlanta and Washington for IBS Executive Meetings, as well as the ENAR Conference in Atlanta, and to IBS Regional and Network Conferences in Denmark, Spain and Ghana). Whilst possibly detracting from my effectiveness as British and Irish Region Secretary, these visits have provided useful insights into how other parts of the society operate, hopefully providing some useful lessons that we will be able to apply within the British and Irish Region. Another continuing activity during the past year has been my involvement in the organisation of the next International Biometric Conference in Dublin from 13th to 18th July 2008 (of which more later).

There have been four regional meetings during the past twelve months, plus the First Channel Network Conference in the Netherlands. In November 2006 we held a full-day meeting on "Statistical Ecology – Statistics and Animal Populations" at Rothamsted Research. This meeting included sessions on "Avian Flu" with talks by Rowland Kao (University of Oxford) on "Preparing for an Emergency: Avian Influenza and the UK Poultry Industry" and Simon Cauchemez (Imperial College – a last minute replacement for Neil Ferguson) on "How mathematical modelling can help in pandemic planning", and on "Bovine Tuberculosis" with talks by Sir David Cox (Nuffield College, Oxford) on "Bovine Tuberculosis: Some Statistical Issues" and Graham Medley (University of Warwick) on "Transmission of Bovine Tuberculosis within GB Cattle Herds", with Robert Curnow (University of Reading) as an invited discussant. These two sessions sandwiched the Presidential Address by retiring Regional President, Joe Perry on "Biometry in England from 1975 – a personal view". The meeting was well attended with about 50 participants. Many thanks to Suzanne Clark for local organisation for the meeting, and to Joe Perry for assistance with the scientific programme.

The second meeting of the year saw the British and Irish Region return to its old home for a joint meeting with the Royal Entomological Society on "Analysing Arthropod Observational Data". The meeting included talks by Patsy Haccou (University of Leiden, The Netherlands) on "The statistical analysis of behavioural data: approaches based on time-structured models", Judith Pell (Rothamsted Research) on "Coping with observational data from experiments on behavioural interactions amongst aphids and their natural enemies", by Bill Budenberg (Tracksys Ltd., Nottingham) on "Examples of the use of software for analysing arthropod observational data prior to statistical testing", by Archie Murchie (AFBI, Belfast) on "Gall midge sex ratios" and by Duncan Sivell (Rothamsted Research) on "Quantifying migration in Lepidoptera". Following the afternoon meeting, Joe Perry presented an evening talk on "Insects in Space". Although the meeting was reasonably well attended with 31 participants, only 6 of these were from the IBS-BIR. Many thanks to Joe Perry and colleagues at the RES for assistance in organising this meeting.

The First Channel Network Conference was hosted by the Netherlands Region of the IBS at the Rolduc Conference Centre in the south of the Netherlands, the conference venue being the imposing abbey of Rolduc. Invited sessions included the Opening Keynote address by Ulrich

Mansmann (University of Munich, Germany) on “Groups, graphs, network: new strategies to handle genomic data” and the Closing Keynote address by Marc Buyse (IDDI, Belgium) on “Fast and Sensitive Trials – New Paradigms in Clinical Research”. Between these were three further invited sessions on “High-dimensional data” with speakers Age Smilde (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands) and Cajo ter Braak (Wageningen University, Netherlands), on “Methods in Epidemiology” with speakers Daniel Commenges (INSERM, France) and Stijn Vansteelandt (University of Ghent, Belgium), and on “Adaptive design in clinical trials” with speakers Chris Jennison (University of Bath) and Fabian Tibaldi (Eli Lilly and Company, Belgium), plus a *Biometrics Showcase* session featuring authors from the British and Irish Region, French Region and Belgium Region, twelve contributed oral sessions containing 48 papers, and a poster session with 13 further papers. Prizes were awarded for the best presentations by young statisticians, and the best poster presentations, with Andrew Brown (Imperial College London) receiving the first prize in the poster competition. With 113 delegates the conference should be considered a success – but the support for the conference from the British and Irish Region was disappointing with only 14 delegates. For the future it is important that the British and Irish Region as a whole commits to the Channel Network, as I believe that this is an important way for the IBS in North-Western Europe to grow. The next conference is in Ghent, Belgium in April 2009. The Channel Network Steering Group will be meeting in April 2008 to agree on plans for the scientific programme for that conference, so please let the BIR Representatives Tim Cole and Joe Perry have any suggestions for possible topics and speakers for the invited sessions and themes for the conference.

There was a gap over the summer with the last two regional meetings organised in September. On September 11th an extremely successful meeting was organised on “Statistical Methods for Genome-Wide Association Studies” at the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Hinxton, near Cambridge. Jointly organised by David Balding and David Clayton on behalf of the IBS-BIR and Richard Durbin from the Sanger Institute, there were nine papers presented during the meeting: “Statistical Issues in Genome-Wide Association Studies” by David Clayton (Cambridge Institute for Medical Research), “Imputation of genotypes for Genome-Wide Association Studies” by Jonathan Marchini (University of Oxford), “CHIAMO”, a new algorithm for genotype calling, by Chris Spencer (University of Oxford), “Design and analysis issues and effect size estimation for Genome-Wide Association Studies, with applications to breast and prostate cancer” by Doug Easton (Strangeways Research Laboratory, University of Cambridge), “Haplotype clustering methods for association studies” by Andrew Morris (Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, Oxford), “Genome-wide association analysis in genetically isolated populations” by Yuri Aulchenko (Erasmus University, Rotterdam), “Testing copy number variants in association studies” by Vincent Plagnol (Cambridge Institute for Medical Research), “Haplotype structure of CNVs in the human genome” by Lachlan Coin (Imperial College London) and “The future for association studies based on resequencing” by Richard Durbin (Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Hinxton). There were over 150 participants at the meeting, with a number of the non-members present taking advantage of our offer of membership as part of the registration fee.

The last meeting of the year, on September 26th, was another joint meeting with the Royal Statistical Society – Environmental Statistics Section, again organised by Ruth King, on “Modelling Ecological Dynamics”. The meeting aimed to present a range of papers covering different modelling approaches, different spatial scales, and different ecological populations. The presented papers were “Density-structured models for population dynamics: parameterisation and application” by Rob Freckleton (University of Sheffield), focussing on

weed dynamics, “Everything must go: predator-prey dynamics and biological control” by Dave Skirvin (University of Warwick), focussing on insect-plant interactions, “Random effect modelling of great tit nesting behaviour” by Bill Browne (University of Bristol), focussing on birds, and “Understanding the causes of population declines in apex marine predators” by Jason Matthiopoulos (University of St Andrews), focussing on seals. The meeting was completed with a presentation by Byron Morgan (National Centre for Statistical Ecology, University of Kent) who presented work on a new tool for model assessment “Model identification, parameter redundancy and exhaustive summaries”. There were about 40 participants, fairly evenly split between the two societies.

Other activities during the year included work on a new recruitment leaflet and poster, led by Angela Wood. These were produced in time to be distributed at the two meetings in September, and copies have now been distributed to all the Statistics Departments in British and Irish Universities, and to other organisations with significant groups of quantitative scientists who might be persuaded to join the IBS. Members are requested to consider recruiting their colleagues to join the society, and should contact the Regional Secretary if they need additional copies of the recruitment leaflet.

We have also been working on developing a new web-site during the past year, with efforts on this led by Peter Colman. Hosted within the main IBS web-site (at www.tibs.org) the new web-site address is <http://www.britishandirish.tibs.org/>. Whilst still being populated, we hope that this new location will make it easier for responsibility for the web-site to be passed between web-site managers in the future, and it is the intention of the international society to encourage all Regions, National Groups and Networks to host their web-sites in this common environment in the future.

The Committee continues to maintain links with both the RSS and PSI, exploring the potential for improving on these links for the benefit of our membership. Mostly these links result in successful joint meetings, but other possibilities exist, and both organisations will have a presence at the IBC in Dublin in July 2008. Future plans for meetings include a joint meeting with the RSS-GAS on “Statistics of Networks” in November 2007 and another joint meeting with the RSS-ESS in May 2008. We are also grateful for the continued support of the Fisher Memorial Trust for the activities of the Region, with funds provided to support the attendance of three young biometricians at the First Channel Network Conference in May 2007. We are currently negotiating with the Fisher Memorial Trust for funds to support a reception for IBS Student Members at the IBC in Dublin, as well as to provide travel grants to help young biometricians attend the conference. In addition, the Fisher Memorial Lecture will be included as part of the IBC.

This neatly brings me to developments with the planning for IBC Dublin 2008! The International Programme Committee, of which both David Balding and I were members, have organised an exciting programme of 20 invited sessions with four full-day short courses organised on the Sunday before the conference starts. Other scientific sessions include those mentioned above, plus showcase sessions for the society’s journals. Three satellite conferences, in St Andrews, Paris and Belfast, are also planned. The online abstract submission system opened on 1st October, with the associated online registration system opening on 1st November. The deadline for the submission of abstracts for contributed papers is January 31st – so please submit your contribution in plenty of time. A range of accommodation is available, from 4* hotels to good quality student rooms on campus at UCD, all within easy reach of the UCD campus where all the scientific sessions will take

place. An array of social events have also been planned, from the opening Welcome reception on Sunday 13th July, through Irish Music Evenings, mid-conference tours (after a half-morning of scientific sessions on the Wednesday morning), to the Gala Dinner in the O'Reilly Hall at UCD on the Thursday evening. Whilst hosting the IBC is certainly hard work, and the LOC may well be looking for additional input from members of the British and Irish Region over the next few months (in particular at this point with attracting sponsors, advertisers and exhibitors to the conference), it does provide the Region with a great opportunity to present the British and Irish approach to Biometry to our colleagues from around the world. Therefore I do urge you to submit a paper and plan to attend the conference. Together with the Organising President for the conference, Tom Louis, and the members of the International Programme Committee and Local Organising Committee, I look forward to seeing you in Dublin next July.

As I complete my seven years as Secretary of the British (and Irish) Region I need to express my thanks to all of those who have supported me during the last seven years. Firstly, my thanks to the various Committee and Council members during that time, too many to mention individually, who have helped with the organisation of meetings and the identification of topics and potential speakers, and who have critically supported my various ideas to develop the IBS both within and outside the British and Irish Region. I must also thank our contacts at the Institute of Biology, who continue to produce and distribute the regional newsletter, and Anthony Edwards and the other members of the Fisher Memorial Trust, for their continued financial support of the Region. Secondly, my thanks to the four Regional Presidents with whom I have worked in the last seven years – Rosemary Bailey, Mike Kenward, Joe Perry and David Balding – and who have again given me much needed support and friendship throughout that time. And finally to the other continuing officers of the Region, Treasurer Peter Rigsby (and his predecessor Gillian Arnold) and Membership Secretary Suzanne Clark (and her predecessor Sue Chinn), who, with the Secretary, provide the continuity of knowledge and activity that is needed for the Region to operate. It has been a great pleasure to work with all of these committed members of the IBS British and Irish Region. I wish my successor as Regional Secretary every success as he takes on the role, and, as I move onto the even greater challenges presented as I take over as International President of the IBS, look forward to a continued interaction with the British and Irish Region membership and committee over the next three years and beyond.

Andrew Mead
British and Irish Region Secretary
06 October 2007