

# UC Merced

## Frontiers of Biogeography

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from the society: The progress and prospects of the International Biogeography Society

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from the society

## The progress and prospects of the International Biogeography Society

I am writing this short commentary as my two-year term as President of the International Biogeography Society is drawing towards its close – I hand over to the next President, Larry Heaney, at the end of the upcoming January meeting – so this is an opportune moment for me to provide some comment for the members of the Society on what we have been up to over the last couple of years but also to reach out through this journal to potential new members as we seek to increase the active membership of the Society. The International Biogeography Society was formally established as a non-profit organisation in 2000 and thus is around ten years old. What is it for, and why should you, the reader, be interested in membership of the society and in contributing to its activities?

The IBS was the brainchild of three American biogeographers, Mark V. Lomolino, Dov Sax, and James H. Brown, who successfully bid to the US National Science Foundation to fund two workshops at the National Centre for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) in Santa Barbara, USA. These workshops produced two main products: a compendium of classic papers in biogeography – *Foundations of Biogeography* – and the establishment of a new society of international scope and purpose. Biogeography is a discipline with rather deep and ancient roots within the natural sciences and has been undergoing an active renaissance for some time: so it is perhaps surprising that it took so long to come up with the idea of establishing a broad international society dedicated to all branches and forms of the discipline.

Learned academic societies have long provided part of the social and institutional structure through which academic progress is guided. They have typically provided specific meeting places, roaming conferences that meet on a regular cycle, bulletins, academic journals, and a mechanism for looking after and expending (mostly small) funds to enable academics to engage in their scholarly activities. A central purpose of these activities is to allow scholars and students to meet, network, and



Robert J. Whittaker,  
president of the IBS

exchange ideas and information. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century it can be argued that there are other ways of achieving many of these goals, but the added benefit of belonging to a dedicated international society of biogeography is the ongoing relationships and connections that flow from continuing membership. Moreover, in addition to the benefits of free access to four key biogeographical journals (*Journal of Biogeography*, *Global Ecology and Biogeography*, *Diversity and Distributions*, *Ecography*), the society's biogeography blog, circulars of posts and meetings, we hope that colleagues will wish to be part of an organisation dedicated to furthering the study and societal relevance of their subject.

The founding group identified three main goals for the society, encapsulated in the IBS mission statement. They are, first, to foster communication and collaboration between biogeographers in disparate academic fields (scientists who would otherwise have little opportunity for substantive interaction and collaboration), second, to increase the awareness and interests of the scientific community and the lay public in the contributions of biogeographers, and third, to promote the training and education of biogeographers so that they may develop sound strategies for studying and conserving the world's biota.

In the decade since its establishment, the society has co-convened two symposium meetings

with other organisations and held four biennial meetings, in three different countries, the US, Spain (Canary Islands) and Mexico, with its next in Crete imminent (further information at <http://www.biogeography.org/html/Meetings/2011/index.html>). Publications from these meetings have included special issues in *Ecography* (recently circulated to IBS members) and in *Journal of Biogeography*, and an edited book (M.V. Lomolino and L.R. Heaney, 2004, *Frontiers of Biogeography*, Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, Massachusetts), in each case providing vehicles for disseminating the state-of-the-art research presented at the meetings to a wider audience. We have been aided in these activities by a considerable range of sponsors and the biennial meetings, in particular, have generated a great deal of interest and much positive feedback from participants. These activities and outputs are central to the mission statement of the society and reflect the efforts and enthusiasm of many members of the society over the last decade. Yet I believe that there is a lot more that the IBS can do for its members and for the subject of biogeography as the society's activities develop in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The board has been keen to ensure a sustainable pattern of growth in the activities of the society, which given our dependence on membership dues for the major part of the society's income, has required a step-by-step approach to development. In the period since our last meeting in Mexico we have seen the launch of two important initiatives.

First, we have launched *Frontiers of Biogeography* in journal format, replacing the previous newsletter form. We have opted for an online free-to-view format for this journal, with the intention of facilitating communication of the latest ideas and of lively debate in biogeography. The launch of this journal has been possible only through the commitment and enthusiasm of the editorial board and the willingness of others to submit copy for consideration. I see this as an exciting initiative for the society and its members, with the potential to develop into a key journal in the field. I hope that you have been enjoying read-

ing contributions in this issue and will be motivated to consider contributing articles to future issues.

Second, we have taken the step of making our first hire, through the good offices of the University of Wisconsin and our present Secretary Jack Williams. Many of you will already have been in communication with our membership services officer, Karen Faller, who is helping ensure that information flows between the society and its members, that the board functions effectively in steering the society forwards, and that we are in position to actively seek new sources of funding, including membership donations and endowments, to secure the operational basis of the IBS.

As a result of these initiatives, active membership of the society has been steadily growing, alongside some generous individual donations (just a click away from the IBS home page!), providing the society with the platform we need to plan for further activities designed to address the wider IBS goals of service to the subject and encouragement of young scientists to contribute to the subject of biogeography.

Having been at both of the two initiating workshops, each of the biennial meetings of the society and one other IBS symposium over the last decade, I am able to reflect on the fact that I have made many new friends and colleagues through the society's meetings. Indeed, the society has been instrumental in the increasing internationalisation of the network with which I have interacted over the last ten years and part of the reason that I have been working with, for example, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Mexican and American students, post-docs and established academics. I know that other colleagues have similarly benefited and hence look forward to each meeting with real enthusiasm.

At the time of writing, registration is open for the 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Meeting, which extends the geographic range envelope of the IBS meetings significantly in an easterly direction. The Crete meeting has an exciting set of symposia and keynote speakers, and following the strength of the contributed papers at the last meeting, I very much look forward to the increased number of

contributed papers we will feature in Crete. The quality and collegiate nature of IBS meetings is such that I am confident that many colleagues will want to prioritise attending this meeting notwithstanding the current restricted budgets for such activities. The IBS has, in particular, made vigorous efforts to ensure that its meetings provide a great experience for early career biogeographers, including plenary poster sessions, programmes of training workshops and evening discussion groups targeted to postgraduate attendees and chaired by senior scientists. The Crete meeting will once again feature this popularly acclaimed format.

For the future, the next biennial meeting is being planned for a venue in Florida, returning the society to US soil for the first time since 2005. Thus far, we have yet to establish a regular pattern of 'off year' meetings, but as mentioned above, IBS has been involved as co-sponsor of two such symposia, the most recent of which was in January 2010 on the theme *Conservation Biogeography: Integrating Biogeography and Conservation Science in A Changing World*, held jointly with UNESCO in their Paris headquarters and co-convened by myself and our Vice-President for Conferences, Jens-Christian Svenning. This meeting provided an opportunity to promote the inclu-

sion of biogeographical research findings in conservation policy formulation. As we continue to build the activities of the society, I anticipate that more such one-off meetings, workshops and symposia can be sponsored or co-sponsored by IBS. Please don't hesitate to contact our Vice-President for Conferences with ideas you may have for such initiatives.

Taken in the round, I think it fair to claim that this young international society has established a successful formula, and has developed a solid platform on which to build. It will do so providing that it can continue to win the support and involvement of a growing membership base, who are joining the society not solely because the IBS membership fee is good value for money, but because being a long-term member of the IBS represents something more, in short, a commitment to the discipline of biogeography through participation in an international forum of scholars.

Robert J. Whittaker

President of the International Biogeography  
Society, 2009–2010  
Oxford, UK

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from the society

## Results from the 2010 IBS Elections

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32% of the IBS members participated in the voting ; thanks to all for your participation. The incoming IBS Board (for 2011-2012) will consist of:

*President:* **Larry Heaney** (elected in 2008)

*President-Elect:* **Rosemary Gillespie**

*VP Conferences:* **Daniel Gavin**

*VP Development:* **George Stevens**

*VP Public Affairs:* **Mike Dawson**

*Secretary:* **Richard Field**

**Lois Alexander**

*Directors at Large:* **Catherine Graham** and **Katherine Willis**

*Student-at-Large:* to be filled by a special election in February 2011.

Both proposed amendments (adding a student-at-large member and increasing the term of director-at-large members, beginning in 2012) to the IBS Constitution passed. Amended versions of the IBS constitution and bylaws will be posted shortly.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Williams

IBS Secretary