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## Frontiers of Biogeography

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from the society: Board, but not boring: what the IBS Board accomplished in 2011

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from the society

## Board, but not boring: what the IBS Board accomplished in 2011

The Governing Board of Directors<sup>1</sup> ('Board') of the International Biogeography Society ('IBS') meets four times per year, mostly quarterly, except that two face-to-face meetings are squeezed into the biennial conference (usually on the days of the workshops and final fieldtrips). This illustrates an important consideration for our young society: the need to minimise costs. Most Board meetings are held by teleconference, with only one face-to-face meeting in each two-year period between the main biennial conferences – usually nine months into the cycle, to aid planning of the next main conference. In 2011, we tried something a bit different. We organised the early-career biogeographers' meeting in Oxford (September 2011; see Nogué et al. 2012) and held the face-to-face Board meeting concurrently with it. This allowed the Board members to contribute to the conference as keynote speakers and by attending the coffee, lunch and evening breaks, mixing with the conference delegates, viewing the posters, etc. Thus the two events could reinforce each other, with the costs of the Board meeting being greatly reduced by external (non-IBS) funding obtained to cover the travel and accommodation costs of the keynote speakers. A disadvantage was that the Board members were not available to attend the talks at the early-career conference – something both the Board members and the conference delegates would have liked. Financially, the society benefitted considerably by the combination of making a small surplus from the conference (the number of registered participants was higher than expected) and the reduced costs of the face-to-face Board meeting.

In 2011 there were four Board meetings: 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> January (both in Crete, at the conference), 6<sup>th</sup> May–3<sup>rd</sup> June (three sub-meetings to finish the agenda!) and 24<sup>th</sup>–25<sup>th</sup> September (approx. 12 hours of discussions). Here I briefly outline the main discussion themes and key deci-

sions made. A strong underlying theme is to provide a high level of transparency – an important motivation for writing this report. In general, the mood over the year has been one of excitement that the IBS, and biogeography generally, is so vibrant, mixed with realism that the society is young, its finances very limited and its Board entirely constituted by full-time biogeographers voluntarily donating their time, and therefore unable to take on too much. The IBS has one employee, Karen Faller, whose vibrancy, competence and people-skills continually impress all who interact with her, to the extent that it is easy to forget she is only paid to work 10 hours per week for the society.

Three main topics have dominated the Board's deliberations: conferences, membership and finances – all inextricably linked. Planning the main biennial conference takes up much of the Board's time, and the society's finances are dominated by it. The 2011 Crete conference was a great success by most criteria, and the Board is most grateful in particular to Spyros Sfenthourakis (Local Host), Jens-Christian Svenning (Vice President for Conferences) and the rest of the organising team. In the final analysis, the Crete conference effectively broke-even, with a net income to the society of \$2,819 (all figures are in US\$), i.e. approximately 2% of total meeting costs. While this reflected the best attainable value for money for delegates, it also meant minimal growth of the society's funds. It is a much lower conference margin than that of most equivalent societies. It is worth noting that the IBS has an extremely and anomalously high financial dependence on membership fees and registrations: 88% of income as of September 2011, with the rest coming from various grants and donations.

While the IBS finances have grown a little over the last year, a major decision made in 2011 was that the IBS needs a reserve put aside to en-

1. To see who is on the board, visit <http://www.biogeography.org/html/About%20IBS/officers.html>

sure its continued existence – for example, to cushion it against a big shock such as the main conference being hit by sudden bad weather, disrupting travel. We also need funds to pay the advance fees required by the venue for each conference. The first target for the reserve is \$20,000. There are no plans to reduce IBS activities or member benefits in order to achieve this; instead, the Board has discussed many options for raising more money. Some of these have now been adopted. First, we have a new membership fee structure (see the IBS website<sup>2</sup>, under ‘Membership’). This maintains the student fees at the same low level and introduces a new, lower fee for developing country members, while increasing the fees for those regular members who can afford it most. Second, we have a campaign to increase donations, legacies, etc, to the society. Recent donors are thanked in this issue of *Frontiers*. Third, we are starting a push to raise as much funding as possible for the 2013 Miami conference; the Board welcomes offers to help out with this. Fourth, to try to make *Frontiers of Biogeography* self-financing, we have introduced small page charges for those with access to the funds to meet these costs of publication, but the charges can be waived for those who don’t have appropriate funds; there are reductions for IBS members (see the journal’s new Instructions for Authors<sup>3</sup>). The costs of *Frontiers* are very low because all the editors and editorial board members donate their time freely, but even so the journal currently requires a small financial contribution from the IBS to support a part-time student editorial assistant. Other possible sources of income for the IBS are being considered, but suggestions are always welcome!

Membership hit a new high in 2011, at 796 current members. The benefits of being a member are gradually accruing (see the Membership page of the IBS website), but we always welcome more suggestions or offers. One of the first things the new Board did, early in 2011, was to perform a survey of members on a range of issues from con-

ference preferences to financial issues, from networking to communication between Board and members. The response rate was tremendous and the results, reported in Field & Heaney (2011), have played a major role in guiding the Board’s deliberations ever since. We conducted some further surveys, of student members and lapsed members, which added information, while generally supporting the outcomes of the main survey (see Santos 2011).

The membership surveys contained much useful feedback on the IBS conferences, and this has guided the Board in planning the 2013 Miami conference. The venues have now been booked and initial deposits paid. (January is peak tourist season in Florida, so be sure to book accommodation as early as possible!) The main symposia have been determined, and much Board attention has been directed towards ensuring diversity of speakers. The workshops and field trips are being planned, as are various student-focused activities. Funds are being sought to support attendance of students, developing country members and invited speakers. See the IBS website (Meetings page) for the latest information, and look out for updates on facebook and the blog<sup>4</sup>. There are now calls for nominations for the Alfred Russel Wallace Award and the new MacArthur and Wilson Award (see page 159 in this issue of *Frontiers* and also the IBS blog, ‘IBS Announcements’ label).

One very encouraging outcome of the membership survey was the large number of people volunteering to help out in various ways. The Board is gradually taking some of these people up on their offers. For example, we have been appointing regional co-ordinators, to encourage international activities of the IBS, including regional IBS meetings at a broader diversity of venues than possible with the biennial conference alone; we see this as important for the future of the society. The Board has also been reviewing, and often expanding, the IBS committees in 2011, and is developing several new ones. This expands what the IBS is able to do and is good for bringing people

2. <http://www.biogeography.org/> (last accessed 6th February 2012)

3. [http://www.biogeography.org/html/fb/FB\\_Instructions\\_for\\_Authors\\_2012.pdf](http://www.biogeography.org/html/fb/FB_Instructions_for_Authors_2012.pdf)

4. <http://biogeography.blogspot.com/> (last accessed 6th February 2012)

other than Board members into the running of the IBS. See the website<sup>5</sup> for the current list of committees, which are populated in part by people volunteering in the membership survey.

Other matters considered by the Board in 2011 included the possibility of holding the main biennial conference at a different time of year. However, from the membership survey and other deliberations, we could find no better timing. We have thought hard about possible locations of the 2015 conference, and recently invited bids for it (Gavin 2011); this is still being considered. The website has been developed and we are considering moving to a different server to increase integration across IBS activities. *Frontiers* has received strong support from the Board and the IBS membership and is moving to eScholarship<sup>6</sup> from volume 4. The Board now has indemnity insurance, a small but important step for the long-term functioning of the society. Finally, we are developing archives for the society, trying to ensure that our history does not get lost.

On a personal note, it is a pleasure to work with such talented, enthusiastic and constructive

people. In 2011 the IBS has continued to grow and develop, and this is in large part due to the enthusiastic participation by members. Long may that continue!

Richard Field

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Edited by Matthew Heard

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5. <http://www.biogeography.org/html/About%20IBS/officers.html> (last accessed 6th February 2012)

6. <http://escholarship.org/> (last accessed 6th February 2012)

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### from the society

## The IBS thanks all donors from 2011

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A total of \$2190 was donated to the society by members during 2011, \$825 of them devoted to developing country memberships.

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Ranker, Robert Ricklefs, David Sánchez-Fernández, Jose María Serra Diaz, Zehau Shen, Alison Smith, Gerald Smith, Rob Whittaker, Jack Williams, Joy Wolf, and 22 anonymous donors. Their donations are helping the development of the IBS, increasing our capacity to support members from developing countries and within-year activities.

Did you know that any member of the IBS may raise an issue or appeal a decision of the governing Board of Directors by placing a matter before the Board of Directors for discussion?

If there is a matter you would like discussed at the next Board meeting, write to the society's Secretary (check current list of officers at <http://www.biogeography.org/>).