

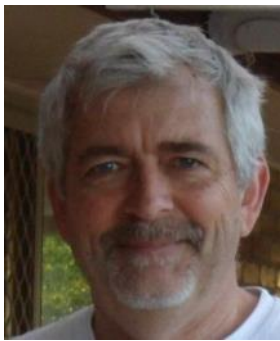
Australasian Region

Newsletter

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<http://www.BiometricSociety.org.au>

From the President's desk, Ross Darnell (Ross.Darnell@csiro.au)



I apologise for the small contribution. I am on leave, holidaying in Brazil. I was able to attend some of the ISI World Statistics Congress sessions in Rio.

"Biometrics by the Harbour" in December is shaping up to be another "friendly, fruitful and fantastic" conference. The venue is one of the prettiest places down under, and the weather is ideal so consider extending your stay for a look around. The Australasian Regional Biometrics Conferences are always welcoming and I make a plea to our

academic supervisors and employers to encourage and support students and early career staff to attend. See page 3 for further information.

The 2020 IBC is looking for a venue in the southern hemisphere. See <http://www.biometricsociety.org/2015/07/invitation-to-host-the-30th-international-biometric-conference-2020ibc/>. Alan Welsh and I are both on the IBS Conference Advisory Committee, so if you have suggestions, contact either of us if you want further information.

Is the only role of the Regional group to convene a conference every two years? Everyone has increasing workloads and volunteer organisations struggle to survive everywhere. What activities and ways of delivering these activities can we suggest?

One function for the society I believe will become increasingly important is that of professional development beyond the biennial conference. Recent discussion on ANZSTAT has been around the pathways of various statisticians. When I joined NSW Department of Ag, of the 15 or so biometricians, about half had come from mathematical statistics training and the remaining from agricultural sciences with additional upskilling in statistics. This mix of training pathways occurs in other application domains.

Skill requirements are changing. The big data phenomena is upon us and classic statistical courses are being replaced by courses on machine learning and distributed file systems and parallel computer coding. So there is a need for continual learning of new techniques for those involved in the analysis of data. Many of the workshops at conferences such as ours provide this type of training. However sometimes they are not available when needed or we cannot find the funds to attend the workshops. It seems increasingly more difficult to obtain employer support to attend conferences and workshops.

The IBS has some videos available to members on several topics. Many of us give seminars, workshops or short courses that might be useful for other members.

As a professional society, we should play a large part in supporting our members to gain new skills.

In closing I would like to remind members we need to promote our society to students. I would ask those who deliver lectures to give 5 minutes of a lecture to encourage students to join our society, a society that is welcoming to young biometricians.

Ross Darnell

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Australasian Region - Council

The regional council comprises:

President: Ross Darnell (CSIRO)

Past-president: David Baird (VSN NZ)

Secretary: Katya Ruggiero (University of Auckland)

Treasurer: Warren Müller (Retired)

Newsletter correspondent: Vanessa Cave (AgResearch)

Regional website manager: Hans Hockey (Biometrics Matters)

IBS Executive Board: Alan Welsh (Australian National University)

Kerrie Mengersen (Queensland University of Technology)

IBS Representative Council Members: Ross Darnell (CSIRO)

Ken Russell (Retired)

Katya Ruggiero (University of Auckland)

Biometrics by the Harbour



Biometrics by the Harbour
Hobart, Tasmania
30th November - 3rd December 2015

Registration and abstract submission is now open.

Visit: <http://www.biometricsociety.org.au/conferences/Hobart2015/index.html>.

On behalf of the Australasian Region of the International Biometric Society we invite you to our biennial conference. Share your work with colleagues working with statistical tools on problems in the biosciences, including ecology, agriculture, biomedical science, public health, environmental science and forestry.

There is a great line-up of invited speakers:

- [Rosemary Bailey \(University of St. Andrews\)](#)
- [Adrian Bowman \(University of Glasgow\)](#)
- [Richard Emsley \(University of Manchester\)](#)
- [John Hinde \(National University of Ireland\)](#)
- [Jay Ver Hoef \(NOAA Fairbanks Alaska\)](#)
- [Thomas Lumley \(University of Auckland\)](#)
- [Otso Ovaskainen \(University of Helsinki\)](#)
- [David Warton \(University of NSW\)](#)



Students and early-career statisticians are encouraged to present, and there will be prizes on offer for presentations of outstanding quality.

The conference will be held at one of Hobart's oldest hotels - Hadley's Orient Hotel (<http://hadleyshotel.com.au>), located in the heart of Hobart. Hobart itself is well known for its history, its natural beauty, its food and culture, and as a gateway to pristine wilderness. The Local Organising Committee have organised an exciting social programme that will provide you with opportunities to meet new faces, catch up old friends, and enjoy Hobart.

The conference will be preceded by four parallel one-day courses on Sunday, November 29. See the [website](#) for details.

Biometrics by the Harbour is generously sponsored by CSIRO, NESP Marine Biodiversity Hub, VSNi, SSAI, the Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies, AgResearch Ltd, and the Statistical Consulting Unit at the ANU.

We look forward to seeing you "by the Harbour"!

Scott Foster

Upcoming Conferences

Australasian Biometrics Conference

The next IBS-AR conference is being held in Tasmania, 30 November-3 December 2015. Details posted at: <http://www.biometricsociety.org.au/conferences/Hobart2015/index.htm>

New Zealand Statistical Association Conference

The 2015 NZSA conference will be hosted by the University of Canterbury (Christchurch) from 24-26 November, 2015. <http://www.stats.org.nz/conference>

Eco-Stats '15: Technological advances between Ecology and Statistics

Eco-Stats '15, hosted by the University of New South Wales (Sydney), will be held 8-10 December, 2015. <http://www.eco-stats.unsw.edu.au/ecostats15.html>

International Biometrics Conference

The next IBC will be held in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, 10-15 July 2016. Details available here: <http://biometricconference.org/>

Australian Academy of Science Celebrates Geoff McLachlan

Congratulations to Geoff McLachlan, recently elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science. The award recognises that Geoff's "*pioneering work in mixture models has been especially influential, from inference and clustering and error-rate estimation for classifiers, to new techniques in analysing gene expression data*".



Mixture models play a central role in statistical science, and Geoff has made a substantial contribution to this field. His research on mixture models for inference and clustering is of particular note, as too is his work on applications of the EM algorithm, especially to complex multivariate problems. Geoff has also made major contributions to error-rate estimation for classifiers (notably his development of almost-unbiased estimators of error rate) and to new techniques in analysing gene expression data (for example, techniques for clustering tissue samples containing thousands of genes and methods for controlling false discovery rate).

Geoff was born and raised in Rockhampton, Queensland. He earned his bachelor degree and PhD from the University of Queensland and has spent most of his career in the Mathematics Department at the University of Queensland. Geoff has been an IBS member since 1974.

An interview with Geoff is available at:
<https://www.science.org.au/fellows-elected-2015>.

Congratulations Geoff!



Professor Geoff McLachlan (left) with the Australian Academy of Science President, Professor Andrew Holmes, at the Fellows' Award Ceremony in Canberra.

Report on IBS Regional Conferences: IBS Channel and EMR-IBS

Due to the fortunate timing of visits to clients in Europe in 2015 I was able to attend two of the many recent IBS regional conferences that always occur in the odd-numbered year in between our biennial International Conferences. The first was in Nijmegen (Netherlands' oldest city) during 20-22 April (www.ibschannel2015.nl). And later during 11-15 May 2015 was the Eastern Mediterranean Region's (EMR) 8th conference in Nevsehir, Turkey (www.biostat.cu.edu.tr/emr2015).

The conference in Nijmegen was the 5th Channel Network Conference, where since 2005 the British & Irish, Dutch, Belgian and French regions combine for a conference rotating around those regions.



With courses Monday morning and finishing Wednesday lunchtime, it was shorter than ours, with about the same numbers of participants and usually 3 parallel sessions. There was no social excursion but the dinner at the Landmark Wijnfort involved a boat trip on the river Waal where we saw a whole new island being created as part of flood control widening the river ("God created the world and the Dutch created Holland"). See photos at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/135268275@N05/shares/s3A6jk>.



The two courses were on splines (Paul Eilers) and INLA (Andrea Riebler) and Sylvia Richardson was the keynote speaker, on genomics. Although the flavour of talks perhaps reflected the location (there is no major pharmaceutical company in the Netherlands) I personally again enjoyed the usual cosmopolitan mixture of topics at Biometrics conferences, as we are a broad church, with worshippers at two altars in particular, whatever the applied field.

Although not a network, the EMR's conference is similar in rotating around countries of the region, namely Israel (2 times), Greece (3) and Turkey (3) to date, with the Palestinian Authority, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Egypt and Jordan included in the region. There is also an informal network with Spain and Italy.

The EMR conference was at a new university in Nevsehir in the famed Cappadocia region, central Turkey.

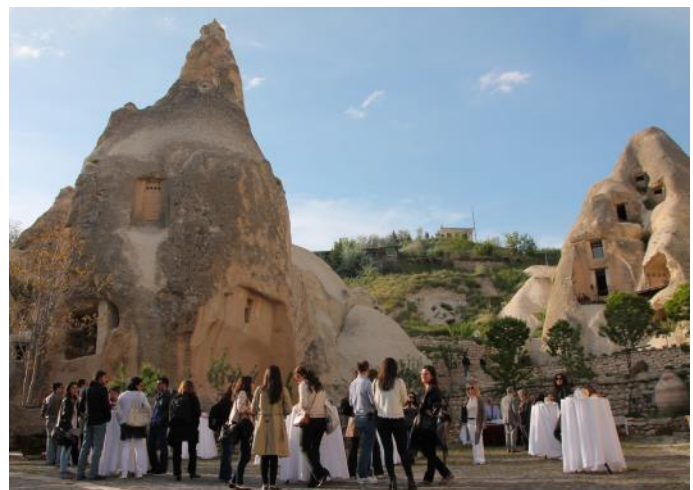




Again a similar size to our conference, it had 3 courses on Monday and finished Friday lunchtime with an excursion Wednesday afternoon. The soft rock in the region forms fascinating shapes such as fairy chimneys and enables house and churches (since the 4th century) to be carved out, including entire underground cities nearby, one of which could house 60,000. The conference dinner in Avanos was completely underground. See dinner and other photos by following the links at <http://stat-athens.aueb.gr/~emribs/> to <https://www.flickr.com/photos/133467734@N02/albums>.

This conference was possibly even more eclectic than Nijmegen. Turkey (popn: 76 million) has many universities with post-graduate statistics and so students were as well represented as in Nijmegen. Also, the diaspora of the EMR was well represented, with many attending from North America and Europe.

I can heartily recommend both conferences in 2017 in Belgium and in Thessaloniki, Greece's second city, respectively. Not forgetting our own conference to come in Hobart later this year!



Hans Hockey

New Australasian Member on the IBS Representative Council

We are pleased to announce that Ross Darnell has been elected the new Australasian representative on the [IBS council](#). 45% of members voted.

Our Representative Council Members are

Ross Darnell	7/1/2015 - 6/30/2019
Kathy Ruggiero	7/1/2013 - 6/30/2017
Kenneth Russell	7/1/2013 - 6/30/2019

Introducing Ross:

Ross is a research scientist with CSIRO focusing on survey and experimental design and statistical modelling of aquatic and agricultural systems. Ross joined CSIRO in 2008, having extensive experience as a lecturer and consulting statistician in research and academic institutions in Australia and the United Kingdom.

He started his career as a biometrician for New South Wales Agriculture, responsible for the statistical design and analyses of agricultural research projects undertaken in the North East region of New South Wales (NSW).

He has published in a diverse range of applied journals including biological, medical, environmental and agricultural and is a co-author of the book "Statistical modelling in R". Ross has presented courses in R to audiences in Australia and Europe.

Ross is a past president of the Queensland Branch of the Statistical Society of Australia and currently President of the Australasian Region of the IBS.

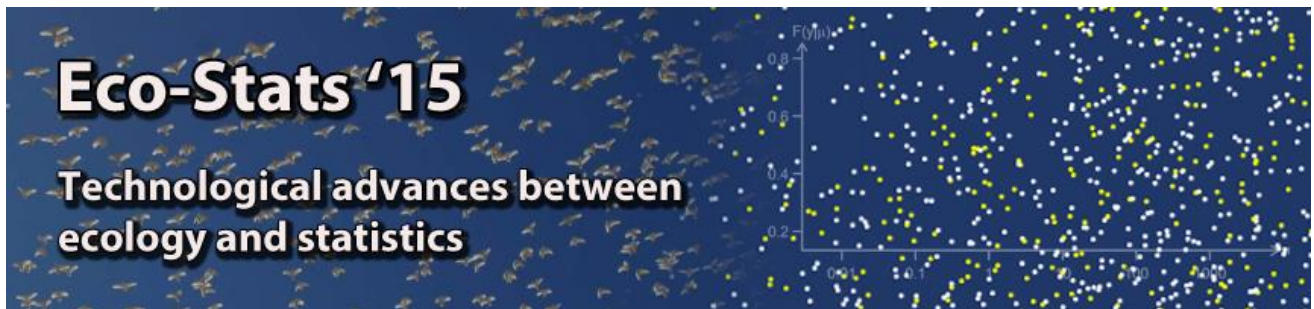
Away from statistics, Ross is a keen kayaker and organises sea kayak trips for the University of Queensland Canoe Club

Ross replaces David Baird, whom we thank for his years of service.



Ross Darnell (left) pictured with his predecessor, David Baird.

Eco-Stats '15: Technological advances between Ecology and Statistics



Eco-Stats '15: Technological advances between Ecology and Statistics 8-10 December 2015, UNSW Australia

Ecologists and statisticians have much to gain from working together, and this conference is designed to provide precisely such an opportunity. This conference is a follow-up to the 2013 meeting, and has been designed as a collaborative forum for researchers with interests in ecology, statistics, or both. Formal proceedings will start on December 8th with "Skills-Building Day", a series of computer-based tutorials run across topics spanning the interests of conference speakers.

Following this world leaders from ecology and statistics have been paired up to present their own perspectives on five topical issues (analysis of metagenomics data in ecology, occupancy modelling with imperfect detection, analysing counts along stream networks, modern capture-recapture, and estimating biodiversity turnover), and round-table discussions will workshop opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration on these topics. Also featured will be a contributed poster session where participants can turn the topic of conversation to their own research. Invited speakers include Otso Ovaskainen (Helsinki), Jay Ver Hoef (NOAA Alaska), Rachel Fewster (Auckland), Darryl Mackenzie (Proteus Wildlife Research Consulting) and Alan Welsh (ANU).

Further details at <http://www.eco-stats.unsw.edu.au/ecostats15.html>

Registration now open.

Want to present in the poster session? **Abstract submissions now open**, closes October 9th.

Hope to see you there!

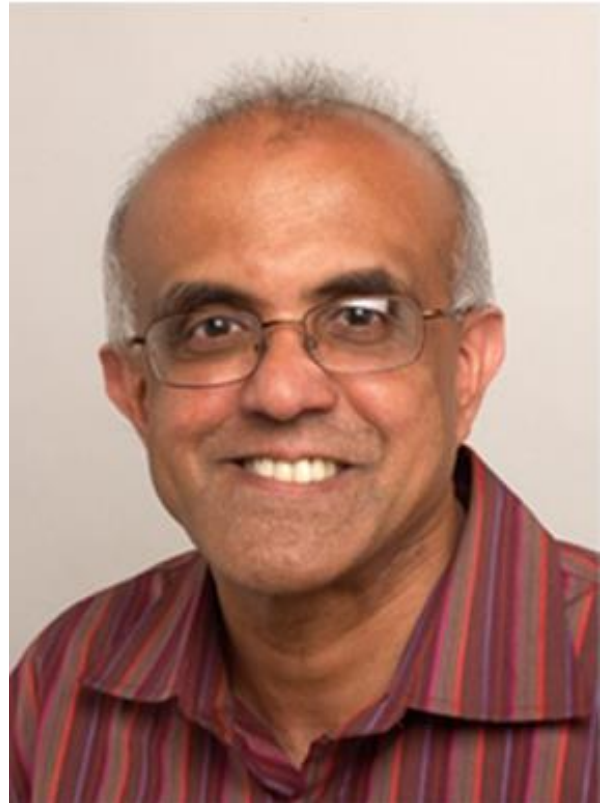
David Warton

Obituary: Nihal de Silva

On the evening of Saturday the 27th of June Nihal de Silva passed away after a battle with acute myloid leukaemia.

Nihal joined what was then MAF Technology as a biometrician on 4 July 1988, and was initially based at Palmerston North before relocating to the Levin Horticultural Research Centre and commuting daily from Palmerston North.

He had migrated to New Zealand from Sri Lanka where he had completed his BSc at the University of Ceylon in 1975 and Doctor of Philosophy in Quantitative Genetics at the University of Peradeniya in 1984. He had previously studied at Massey University where he completed his Masters in Agronomy in 1981, to be followed by a Diploma in Social Sciences in Statistics in 1992.



His early work involved kiwifruit on-orchard crop estimation, where his past research experience in plant sciences and expertise in statistical software were to prove valuable.

Nihal subsequently transferred to HortResearch, Palmerston North at the time the Crown Research Institutes were established in 1992. He later relocated to the Auckland site and became the Biometrics team leader. In this role he mentored a number of young statisticians which continued when HortResearch merged with Crop and Food forming Plant and Food Research. He was always more than happy help and very approachable. One common theme amongst the scientists he interacted was how he made the effort to understand the science behind the data.

In addition to the high regard in which he has been held for his professional abilities, Nihal will be greatly missed for his many fine personal qualities. These very qualities were very much to the fore in recent months as he struggled to continue to give his very best in the job that meant so much to him. The large number of tributes on the PFR internal site is a testament to how valued Nihal was as both a colleague and friend within the institute.

Mark Wohlers and Peter Alspach
