

## AIBSnews

Source: BioScience, 55(2) : 183-186

Published By: American Institute of Biological Sciences

URL: [https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568\(2005\)055\[0183:A\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1641/0006-3568(2005)055[0183:A]2.0.CO;2)

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# AIBS *news*

FEBRUARY 2005/VOLUME 55 NUMBER 2

## **AIBS Partners with New National Evolutionary Synthesis Center**

The new National Evolutionary Synthesis Center (NESCent), in Durham, North Carolina, has opened its doors—with a little help from AIBS. Established with a \$15 million, five-year grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the center is a collaboration between Duke University, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. AIBS is providing education and outreach services to NESCent under a subcontract and is currently in the process of hiring a full-time education and outreach manager to be stationed at NESCent.

Building on the highly successful National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis model, at the University of California–Santa Barbara, NESCent will “serve the needs of the evolutionary biology community by providing mechanisms to foster synthetic, collaborative, cross-disciplinary studies. It will play a pivotal role in the further unification of the biological sciences as it draws together knowledge from disparate biological fields to increase our general understanding of biological design and function. Finally, the Center will play a critical role in organizing and synthesizing evolutionary knowledge that will be useful to policy makers, government agencies, educators and society” (from NSF’s April 2003 program solicitation, at [www.nsf.gov/pubs/2003/nsf03570/nsf03570.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2003/nsf03570/nsf03570.pdf)).

Several AIBS staff members in Washington, DC, are working with NESCent, including Susan Musante, education and outreach manager; Oksana Hlodan, ActionBioscience.org editor; and Robert Gropp, senior public policy representative. The philosophy that they, together with NESCent scientists and the NESCent education and outreach manager to be hired by AIBS, will promote at the center sees education as scholarship in its

own right, integral to the intellectual life of NESCent and its synthesizing mission.

Educators and education staff will be involved in as many of the center’s research working groups as feasible. Education activities at NESCent will (a) facilitate the integration of evolution research at NESCent into the development of pedagogical resources, curricula, and learning materials for diverse audiences across the country; (b) provide the NESCent research community with insights from evolution educators on how people learn and process information about evolution, historical inference, and scientific reasoning; (c) engender consideration of the social implications of evolutionary studies at NESCent; and (d) bring together people with the right experience to produce a better, broader, deeper understanding of evolution and promote public awareness that such understanding is essential to human well-being.

The NESCent education and outreach manager will interact with NESCent scientists as research directions emerge; assist working groups in identifying individuals who can ensure that the broader implications of NESCent activities are considered during project planning; arrange for interest groups to meet with visiting scientists; and arrange public lectures, write materials, and identify opportunities for outreach that may not be obvious to those engaged in NESCent research. NESCent and AIBS will ensure that participants in the NESCent education working sessions and all related NESCent activities are a diverse group, including students, K–12 educators, and members of underrepresented minorities in the biological sciences.

Noteworthy among NESCent’s planned education activities are its education working group sessions. The

evolution-education community will be brought together at NESCent regularly to identify new directions and initiatives for education and outreach, build upon new science emerging from NESCent, engage NESCent scientists in evolution-education challenges and initiatives, and develop new grant collaborations. Formal commitments to participate in the working group sessions have been obtained from such organizations as the Understanding Evolution Web site project at the University of California Museum of Paleontology, the Explore Evolution project at the University of Nebraska State Museum, the BioQUEST Curriculum Consortium, the education division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Society for the Study of Evolution, the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, and the National Center for Science Education.

Also noteworthy is the Visiting NESCent Scientists Program. The AIBS Public Policy Office, with an established reputation for bridging the gap between scientists and policymakers, will bring NESCent scientists and educators to

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Washington, DC, or to other appropriate venues for a few days each year. AIBS staff will train NESCent personnel in effective communication with policy-makers and the media, help identify public policy audiences that would benefit from learning about NESCent research and other activities, and help communicate NESCent's findings to the broader community. AIBS public policy staff will also stand ready to arrange visits to NESCent for congressional policymakers.

The AIBS journal, *BioScience*, and the AIBS bilingual (English and Spanish) education Web site, ActionBioscience.org, will publish some of the results of research and education activities conducted at NESCent.

For further information, see the NESCent Web site at [www.nescent.org](http://www.nescent.org) or contact Cliff Cunningham, NESCent director (e-mail: [cliff@duke.edu](mailto:cliff@duke.edu)), or Richard O'Grady, AIBS executive director (e-mail: [rogrady@aibs.org](mailto:rogrady@aibs.org)).

### **An Invitation to Comment on NEON Design**

The initial meeting of the NEON (National Ecological Observatory Network) Design Consortium, held in Los Angeles, 4–6 January 2005, has produced first drafts of the project's committee and subcommittee reports. Those documents have been posted at [www.neoninc.org](http://www.neoninc.org) as PDF files that can be easily downloaded for public comment.

The NEON design process begins by considering eight ecological challenges of national interest: biodiversity and ecosystem functioning, biogeochemical cycling, climate, hydroecology, infectious disease, invasive species, land use, and emerging issues. NEON's designers, more than 160 scientists, engineers, and educators, are creating the blueprint for a continental-scale research platform with a distributed infrastructure network that will transform the way ecological research is conducted and enable the forecasting of biosphere phenomena.

Readers are invited to download and read the committee reports and to provide confidential comments to the NEON Project Office through Web-based evaluation surveys. In addition to the eight science areas under discussion,

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visitors to [www.neoninc.org](http://www.neoninc.org) are invited to comment on committee reports that relate to the unique educational opportunities that could be supported by NEON, on the cutting-edge technologies that could be part of the project's infrastructure, and on how NEON will be organized and operate.

The first-round comment period ends 20 February 2005. Additional opportunities for public comment will follow the Design Consortium meetings scheduled for 15–17 March 2005 and 7–9 June 2005.

### **NEON Postdocs Arrive at AIBS**

Six postdoctoral associates have joined the NEON Project Office to contribute their scientific expertise and research skills to the design process of the continental-scale ecological observatory network.

Kit Batten earned her PhD and MS in ecology from the University of California–Davis and her BA in chemistry from Oberlin College. Her areas of expertise are plant–soil interactions, microbial ecology, invasion ecology, and invasive species policy. Examples of her research include examining the effects of dam removal on invasive species spread and investigating sediment microbial community composition in mercury mine–impacted sites.

Jeff Hollister holds a PhD in environmental science from the University of Rhode Island, an MA in environmental management from Duke University, and a BS in biology from Baker University. His research experiences range from assessing the accuracy of land-use and land-cover area estimates from the National Land Cover Dataset to predictive modeling of metal concentrations in estuarine sediment.

David Kirschtel has a broad background in environmental sciences coupled with experience in science education. He earned his PhD in botany from the University of Vermont, an MS in aquatic biology from the University of Louisville, and a BA in biology from Clark University. He has served as a lecturer in the biology department at the University of Washington, and he received a three-year NSF grant to conduct workshops in

active, inquiry-based learning for college faculty in the Pacific Northwest.

Rand Knight earned his PhD and MS in ecosystems analysis from the University of Washington, College of Forest Resources, and his BA in environmental studies from Middlebury College. His areas of expertise include late-successional forest ecosystem processes and spatial pattern analysis, modeling, and prediction. His research activity includes a focus on stem-mapping methodologies and analyses of stem density, sample size, and spatial patterns in old-growth mixed-conifer forests.

Meeko Oishi has a background in nonlinear dynamical systems and control, and an interest in mathematical modeling and analysis of biological systems and human-affected ecosystems. She earned a PhD and an MS in mechanical engineering from Stanford University and a BSE in mechanical engineering from Princeton University. She was awarded NSF graduate research fellowships for 1998–1999 and 2000–2002 and recently served as a science and technology policy intern at The National Academies.

Brian Wee received a PhD in ecology, evolution, and behavior from the University of Texas at Austin, an MS in computer science from Northwestern University, and a BS in information systems and computer science from the National University of Singapore. His dissertation focused on investigating the relative effects of behavioral, physiological, and landscape barriers on the genetic structure of insect populations. He has worked with Andersen Consulting in leading instructional design, knowledge management, business process redesign, and Web development projects.

### Two New Student Chapters Join AIBS

The John Carroll University Biology Club (University Heights, Ohio) and the Howard University Environmental Biology Scholars (Washington, DC) are the newest additions to the roster of AIBS student chapters. Student chapters appoint a representative to AIBS and receive up to five complimentary subscriptions to *BioScience*. Student chap-

ters may apply through a competitive program to receive support for chapter activities. For more information, see [www.aibs.org/student-chapters](http://www.aibs.org/student-chapters).

If your biology club would like to become a chapter of AIBS, contact Susan Musante, AIBS education and outreach program manager (telephone: 202-628-1500, ext. 249; e-mail: [smusante@aibs.org](mailto:smusante@aibs.org)).

### Diversity Programs and Outreach Directory Online

The AIBS Web site now has a section devoted to diversity programs and resources ([www.aibs.org/diversity/](http://www.aibs.org/diversity/)). This section serves as a resource for biologists interested in diversity issues by providing links to diversity programs offered by AIBS (including the Diversity Scholars Program and Diversity Outreach Directory) and other organizations. For more information about these programs aimed at increasing the diversity in the biological sciences community, contact Susan Musante, education and outreach program manager (telephone: 202-628-1500, ext. 249; e-mail: [smusante@aibs.org](mailto:smusante@aibs.org)).

### Recent Articles Online at [www.actionbioscience.org](http://www.actionbioscience.org)

#### Original article in English

- “Natural Selection: How Evolution Works,” interview with Douglas Futuyma, professor of evolutionary biology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook

#### Lesson for classroom activities

- “The Cantakerous Pathogen,” written for high school and lower undergraduate learning by David Brock, AP biology instructor, Roland Park Country School, Baltimore, to accompany the interview “Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases: A Global Problem,” with Stephen S. Morse, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

#### Spanish translations of previously posted articles

- “La Población y el Ambiente: El Reto Global” [Population and the Environment: The Global Chal-

lenge], by Don Hinrichsen, senior program officer with the United Nations Population Fund, and Bryant Robey, editor of *Population Reports*, a publication of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

- “La Ciencia y la Religión” [Science and Religion], interview with Kenneth R. Miller, professor of biology in the Department of Molecular Biology, Cell Biology, and Biochemistry at Brown University, Rhode Island
- “¿Cómo Afectará la Sexta Extinción a la Evolución de las Especies?” [How Will the Sixth Extinction Affect the Evolution of Species?], by Norman Myers, fellow at Green College, Oxford University, and Andrew H. Knoll, professor of biology at the Botanical Museum, Harvard University
- “Enfermedades Infecciosas Emergentes y que Reaparecen: Un Problema Global” [Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases: A Global Problem], interview with Stephen S. Morse, director of the Center for Public Health Preparedness, Mailman School of Public Health, and faculty member in the epidemiology department, Columbia University

### Recent Public Policy Reports Online at [www.aibs.org](http://www.aibs.org)

#### Public Policy Report for 18 January 2005

- Back at it: A look at the 109th Congress thus far
- Graduate students: Apply for the 2005 AIBS Emerging Public Policy Leadership Award
- OMB releases new peer review guidelines
- President responds to Ocean Commission report
- Philadelphia Academy of Science cuts curators

- Court: Disclaimers must come out of Cobb County textbooks

- New in *BioScience*: "Environmental Science Sacrificed in Latest US Budget"

- From the *Federal Register*

**Public Policy Report for 20 December 2004**

- New audits critical of NSF grant oversight

- Earmarked spending impacts post-secondary education grant program

- Lawsuit against Dover, PA, school board moves forward

- Treasury Department loosens restrictions on publication of research from Cuba, Iran, and Sudan

- New Center for Synthesis of Evolution Research

- From the *Federal Register*

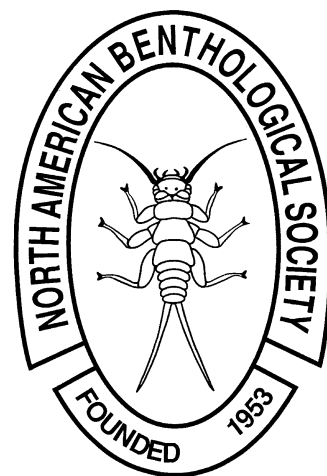
- New in *BioScience*: "New ESA Amendments: Sound Science or Political Shell Game?"

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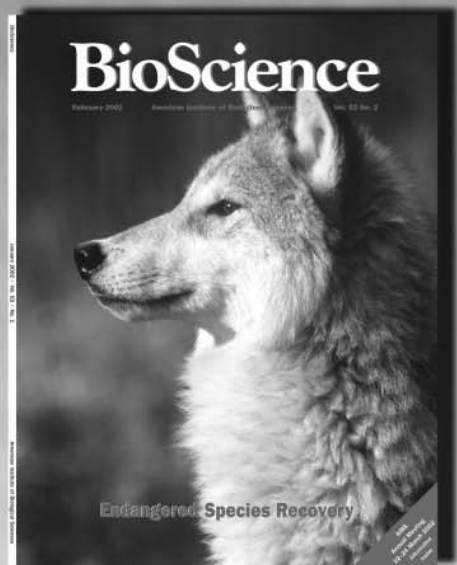
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