

AEDA News
Issue 1 (1.6.07)

AEDA News is a fortnightly email for members of the Applied Environmental Decision Analysis CERF Hub.

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1. A vision for AEDA (A message from the Director)

Welcome to AEDA, a new CERF research hub of which you are a member.

So, what is it that we are we trying to achieve with this research hub? AEDA brings together many of the most widely published quantitatively oriented conservation ecologists in the world. We have two main purposes, and these reflect the reason why we were one of the first three funded CERFs from over 140 bids. First, we intend to publish high quality novel research in international journals. Second we want to make this research useful and relevant to Australian management and policy agencies.

As a group we have a track record in both areas so what's new? AEDA, which has nodes in Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne, provides long-term funds to increase the volume and quality of our output, increase interactions between ourselves (eg, through our soon to be established website, workshops and communication devices like this newsletter), increase interactions with the outside world, and enhance our interaction with managers and policy-makers. This is an unparalleled opportunity for everyone.

In December the scientists named on the AEDA grant met to define some research themes and workshops. Since then workshops and meetings have occurred, more are planned, and we are open to suggestions for new and innovative ways to getting problems solved and science done.

Unlike most centres and CRCs, ours is light on bureaucracy and structure. This saves money and time, plus it promotes innovation. In my opinion the words research and management should never appear in the same sentence (except for that one). However there is no such thing as power without responsibility. It is the responsibility of all AEDA members to play a role in communication and decision-making.

Hugh Possingham
Director, AEDA
June 2007

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2. About AEDA News (A note from the editor)

Hello AEDAites everywhere, and welcome to the first issue of AEDA News. Because this research hub is new and spread over several campuses, most members of AEDA are yet to meet everyone else, and most of you probably haven't yet figured out exactly what AEDA is or will mean to you. Therefore it's been decided that as a first step we'll try to improve internal communication with a regular fortnightly email to all members (and that job has fallen to me).

So, who am I? I'm David Salt, your new science communicator. I've only just begun with

AEDA so I'm yet to meet many of you. I'm based in Canberra at ANU with David Lindenmayer's mob but I hope with time I'll be interacting with all the nodes. My background is in science writing and magazine editing. I set up The Helix magazine back in the 80s for CSIRO Education and have been working with and around scientists on a broad spectrum of communication activities ever since. I was Communications Manager for CSIRO Wildlife and Ecology for a few years and I've written a book on agroforestry and biodiversity with David Lindenmayer.

In the coming months I'll be contributing to the development of AEDA's communication strategy while trying to learn about the science you're all involved in. An important part of communication is internal communication and this newsletter is a step in that direction.

If this newsletter is to work it needs to be of value to its members. It needs to be reliable and contain information that makes it worth reading. We hope it will bring you news of up and coming workshops; reports of past workshops; profiles of members; news of opportunities and events relevant to AEDA members: and tid bits of gossip if I can extract any from any of you. To be of ongoing interest it will need AEDA members feeding me information and feedback on what they want (and don't want).

My aim is to keep this newsletter reliable and simple. By reliable I mean you can expect it every two weeks. By simple I mean it won't be endlessly repeating information, carry unnecessary detail, and it won't come with any attachments. It will, however, provide signposts to where you can go to find information (many of which will be to our own website when it's set up). So, if you're sending info to your own node members that you think might be of interest to all AEDA members, consider sending that info just to me. I'll put it in AEDA news and everyone gets to see it just once.

Finally, if anyone has a suggestion for a more exciting name for this newsletter (than AEDA News) please let me know.

David Salt
Knowledge Broker, AEDA

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3. AEDA in the news – Wildlife encounters on Radio National

ABC Radio National featured David Lindenmayer's research down at Jervis Bay in its religion program Encounters on Sunday 13 May. The broadcast was called 'Wildlife Survivors' and featured AEDA members Darren Brown, Chris MacGregor, Damian Michael (as well as David) talking about biodiversity, fire and spirituality at Jervis Bay. You can listen to the segment online by going to <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/encounter/default.htm>. (The broadcast should be available online for several weeks, and there's a written transcript available as well.)

Here's an extract from the program from David Lindenmayer: "What our research team specialises in is trying to understand what happens on the ground. So, there's a lot of computer modelling and computer simulation of what people think should happen, and that's all great. But you actually need to go out and collect the real numbers in terms of what does what where and why and how that's happening, to understand the processes that drive the system, so you can better manage the forest, the shrubland, the woodland, all the different ecosystems. And the reason that that's important is that if you just simulate it, as people often say, you can go from virtual reality to real stupidity very fast."

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4. Opportunities for Early Career Researchers in AEDA – Fresh Science (nominations close 15.6.07)

Fresh Science selects sixteen early-career researchers and brings them to Melbourne where they present their work to the media, schools and the public. Now in its tenth year, Fresh Science is supported by the Federal and Victorian Governments, NewScientist, The Australian and Melbourne Museum.

Fresh Science 2007 will be held in Melbourne from 13 to 16 August 2007. Stories will be released to the media during the event and in the weeks following. Fresh Science offers the potential for wide media exposure for the work of early career researchers and their organisations. It helps young researchers develop expertise in presenting their ideas clearly to a general audience and to the media.

Details of previous winners and how to enter can be found at www.freshscience.org

Travel and accommodation will be provided for participants from outside Melbourne.

The closing date for nominations is 5pm Friday 15 June 2007.
Nominations must be made on the Fresh Science nomination form – available in different formats at www.freshscience.org

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5. Notes on the Landscape Restoration Workshop (Brisbane, 23/24 May 2007)

In attendance: David Lindenmayer, Hugh Possingham, Clive McAlpine, Brendan Wintle, Judit Szabo, Mick McCarthy, Michiala Bowen, Phil Gibbons, Rebecca Montague-Drake.

The question posed for this dazzling array of minds was: In managing fragmented landscapes when do you invest in improving what's there, and when do you invest in revegetation? Hugh began discussions by presenting a simple approach to prioritisation whereby individual projects (or groups of projects) are compared with the following simple 'efficiency' formula: 'Biodiversity Benefit' x 'Probability of success' divided by the cost. This he proposed would lead to substantial improvements in prioritisation in many areas.

We then discussed more sophisticated approaches to prioritisation based on principles derived from systematic conservation planning. There was some spirited debate about the availability of data to do this effectively in a majority of landscapes.

As a first step, Mick suggested we resolve our question using data that has been collected by David (and his team) and Clive (and his team) with a simple model whereby taxa are modelled as a function of the amount of native vegetation in the landscape, the amount of planted vegetation (revegetation) in the landscape, and an interaction between the two. This will tell us the relative importance of remnant vegetation and revegetation for different taxa and be the subject of a forthcoming paper.

We also resolved that our question can't be fully answered in a day, so have posed further research questions that will be the subject of future research and a dedicated person to tackle them.

Phil Gibbons
ANU Node, AEDA
Philip.Gibbons@anu.edu.au
May 2007

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6. AEDA Work Shop on Optimal and Robust Monitoring for Conservation. (6-10 August, Freycinet Lodge, Tasmania.)

Limited places - preliminary invitations have been sent out to people listed as specialising in monitoring. If AEDA people know of anyone who they think should be in attendance (or they would like to come themselves), then please contact Karen Hurley: k.hurley@uq.edu.au

What's it about:

A central role of ecological monitoring is to inform management aimed at continuous improvement, by iteratively updating information about the effectiveness of actions or the magnitude of their impacts. However, monitoring may be expensive and incurs an opportunity cost with respect to time and money in environmental management, making it crucial that monitoring is designed to answer important questions efficiently.

Monitoring may fail to positively influence management when the link between monitoring results and management decisions is unclear, when the questions being addressed are poorly defined, or when the experimental design is inadequate for discerning relevant changes. We argue that the majority of monitoring designs fail on at least one of these criteria and that a formal approach to adaptive management, based on decision theory principles clarifies the role of monitoring, highlights the importance of good monitoring design and decreases the instances of wasteful monitoring.

In this workshop, we'll address some key questions about monitoring allocation and design within a decision theory framework using some motivating case studies including monitoring and reporting on the success of conservation strategies, design of optimal conservation and restoration investments, and optimal monitoring and control of weed, disease and bio-invasions.

The workshop will be run in same vein as our previous NCEAS working groups (see www.nceas.ucsb.edu/). Discussions will not be limited to the listed cases and new ideas and problems are always welcome. Participants have a wide range of experience and skills in conservation management, monitoring, surveillance, decision theory and optimisation.

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That ends issue 1 of AEDA News.

If you have news or views relating to AEDA or of interest to AEDA members, please send it to dsalt@cres.anu.edu.au (Please note that David Salt works Wednesday to Friday.)