

# The quantitative study of marked individuals in ecology, evolution and conservation biology: a foreword to the EURING 2003 Conference

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Few fields in modern ecology have developed as fast as the analysis of marked individuals in the study of wild animal populations (Seber & Schwarz, 2002). This is the topic of EURING Conferences, which from 1986 have been the premier forum for advances in capture–recapture methodology. In this sense, EURING Conferences still maintain the flavour that originally inspired scientific meetings: to disseminate the very last findings, ideas and results on the field. Traditionally, EURING Conferences have been published in the form of Proceedings, which because of their relevant content, become a required reading to anyone interested in the capture–recapture methodology.

EURING 2003 was held in Radolfzell (Germany), hosted by the Max Planck Research Centre for Ornithology, and the Proceedings appear as a special issue of *Animal Biodiversity and Conservation*. The full title of the 2003 meeting was "The quantitative study of marked individuals in ecology, evolution and conservation biology", which stands for one of the main aims of the meeting: to establish the capture–recapture approach as one of the standard methodologies in studies within these fields. One of the shared views is that capture–recapture methodologies have reached a considerable maturity, but the need still exists to spread their use as a "standard" methodology. The nice review paper by Lebreton et al. (1993) in *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* is still applicable, in that general ecologists and evolutionary biologists still resist their general use. The same applies to conservation biology, where the analysis of marked individuals may also be a key tool in its development. We hope, with the spread of 2003 Proceedings, to help to fill this gap.

The Proceedings follow the same general structure as the Conference. We organised the EURING meeting in 10 technical sessions, covering what we considered as fastest growing areas in the field. We appointed for each session, two chairs, which were charged with selecting 4–7 talks on the topic of their session. Each session additionally included a plenary conference intended to summarise or to provide a general but synthetic flavour of the topic. As a novelty in EURING conferences, we asked session chairs to include at least one talk dealing with study species other than birds. This is the result of a heated but fruitful discussion at EURING 2000 in Point Reyes, and fits with the general aim to spread the capture–recapture methodology beyond zoological groups: although EURING as an organization, deals with birds, and conferences have traditionally focused on this group, the capture–recapture approach is becoming a standard way to address biologically relevant questions on populations and individuals (Schwarz, 2002), for any zoological group. This volume, contains several nice examples of taxa other than birds.

As far as possible, we selected chairs so that each session was delineated with a good balance between the biological and the statistician emphasis. This balance has in fact characterised EURING conferences, which in addition to the workshop atmosphere always present, has lead to very fruitful exchanges. Session

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chairs were also asked to act as editors for the papers within their session. All the papers were hence subjected to peer review, as in any other issue of *Animal Biodiversity and Conservation*, and presentation of the paper in the Conference did not assure publication in the Proceedings. This has led to an even higher quality of the papers presented at the Conference. Editors were additionally asked to write a short summary on their session. Given that these summaries also present the views of the Editors on the different topics presented, we have preferred each introduction to appear as a short paper in the front of each one of the sessions, so that it can be cited as a regular paper.

The Proceedings start with the Honour Speaker Talk by James Nichols (Nichols, 2004). This talk is traditionally the last one in the Conference, but we think that it nicely summarises how and why capture–recapture has developed to its current healthy state. The talk is in fact a tribute to David Anderson, to whom, as Nichols says, all of us are more or less in debt. Hence, we have preferred to move the Honour Talk to the front position of the Proceedings, and we would like this to be our humble tribute to David.

At the end of the Proceedings appear a few papers which were presented in poster format, and a paper summarising several of the main topics presented at the traditional short course on capture–recapture, this time organized by the unflagging Evan Cooch.

We would like to thank all the people who helped in one way or another to the successful completion of the EURING Conference and the Proceedings. We thank to the Session Chairs, their dedication and enthusiasm in organizing the sessions and also in editing the different papers. All their names appear in the front page of the Proceedings as credits. We thank Wolfgang Fiedler for the local organization of the event: a very difficult and exhausting task that is not always properly recognized. Jean Clobert, although unfortunately unable to attend the Conference, supported us with ideas and friendship meanwhile preparing the scientific program. Evan Cooch maintained the always successful web page (which probably will also become a classic in EURING conferences...), and organized the traditional course on capture–recapture. Charles Francis very efficiently organized the poster session and acted as editor for the papers sent for publication. Finally we thank the Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología for financial support to the publication of this special issue of *Animal Biodiversity and Conservation* (B.O.S. 2002–12283–E) and to the Natural History Museum of Barcelona for their support.

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