

## **Animal Social Structures: Introduction to Methods and Models**

23-27 November 2015

Mossel Bay, South Africa

### **Participant 1, postdoctoral fellow**

*Interests* – evolution of group-living, societies, cooperation, conflicts.

*Positive notes:* Small size helped to interact frequently with the instructor. Well structured. Friendly and skilled instructor. Instructor took the challenges to make us understand the statistics behind the tools, which was much appreciated. Almost all aspects of social network analyses were covered so that the participant gained a full picture of what is available with such analyses. The instructor shared important R material he created which will most certainly facilitate my life regarding future analyses!

*Negative notes:* This workshop covered a lot of theoretical and statistical concepts which can be hard to assimilate and process. An exercise based on a case study in the afternoon to apply and interpret the results using the techniques seen in the morning.

### **Participant 2 postdoctoral fellow**

*Interests:* Ecology of marine apex predators

I found the course to be interesting, stimulating and well-presented. It was definitely worth the time. Mauricio covered a large amount of information very well, striking a good balance between covering a lot of ground and providing details where necessary. It was very good that he provided a large literature library, and referred to these in his slides. Theory was well-balanced with practical sessions. He freely provided his R-scripts for the practical component, which is both generous and useful. Interaction among the attendees (e.g., discussing concepts and applications) was good.

### **Participant 3 graduate student**

*Interests:* Birds, Behavioural Ecology, Animal communication, Evolution of signals, Social structures, dynamics and communication

**POSITIVE ASPECTS:** The workshop is really useful for increasing the statistical knowledge, Mauricio is clear and basic enough to follow. All the scripts and the practical tool are precious. I was like a blind person walking alone in the dark, thank you!

**NEGATIVE ASPECTS:** the workshop was divided in theoretical and practical parts, but for me the last ones were not always easy to follow both because of download problems and because of the lack of biological background of the exercise.

SUGGESTIONS: maybe you could take into account that not all the people have easy access to internet all the time, so in the site I advise you to put a list with all the downloads (both software and scripts) at least one week before the beginning of the workshop. Finally, I think that it could be nice and useful to discuss a paper before re-using the data for the statistical exercises!

#### **Participant 4 undergraduate student**

*Interests:* Social behaviour and networks of chondrichthians

I thought the flow of the presentation was well thought out, making it easier to understand the material. I thought the amount of time of lectures vs. exercises was great, giving us enough time to try it on our own while it was still fresh. The only negative I can think of was the struggle people had with using so many programs and R packages. Other than that, I found the workshop very useful and has got me even more interested in these techniques to analyze shark populations.

#### **Participant 5 graduate student**

*Interests:* Movement behaviour and dietary analysis of chondrichthyans, and ichthyofaunal community assessment.

The Animals Social Structure Analysis workshop was an excellent course in statistics. The flow in which the different subjects are introduced and explained is fantastic and it makes understanding the dense subject matter a lot easier. The slides were clear and easy to follow.

Having the R functions worked out in the scripts were a major help, and will be useful in the future when they have to be used in future projects.

There were practically no negative aspects to course. Some of the software were single operating system only, limiting their use to windows.

There were maybe a few points of improvements, e.g. adding the pre-downloaded R packages to the workshop file, and when creating a pdf document of the powerpoint presentation, separating the slides according to the animation, thus it will be easier to understand the flow of certain slides.

#### **Participant 6 graduate student**

*Interests:* The evolution of animal personalities and their effect on the ecology and fitness of individuals.

I really enjoyed the workshop. The presentations allowed me to understand and learn some of the main analytical methods used to assess the relationships and networks occurring between individuals and species. I believe that reserving a good amount of time during the workshop to familiarize with the statistical programs in order to translate the theory into practical exercises really helped me understand the concepts behind such analytical methods. Understanding such concepts will be very useful for the analysis of my research data.

### **Participant 7 graduate student**

*Interests:* marine mammals, specifically whales, behavioural research as well as the ecology and social dynamics of large cetaceans.

I enjoyed the workshop immensely and am extremely grateful to Oceans Research and Dr. Gennari for organizing the whole event. The workshop was well spaced over a sufficiently long time so we were not overloaded with too much information in a too short period of time and the material was covered sufficiently. Discussion on relatively new techniques of analysis was very helpful and I fully intend to make use of the majority of the things I've learnt in the next 2 months as I finish up my MSc thesis.

There was sufficient time for questions and discussions of the different topics, which I found very helpful. The organization was very good too. I really have nothing negative to say.

Thanks again for organizing the workshop, it was truly invaluable.

### **Participant 8 graduate student**

The workshop content was very well organized and comprehensive in its coverage of the subject matter. Fundamental ideas were all well introduced and explained before more delving into more complex ideas and methods.

An online repository of workshop material was provided for download ahead of the course, but not all participants had access to a reliable internet connection. An alternative source was provided during the workshop by means of a USB drive, but it may be beneficial to clearly outline what material is essential for each day of the course, and what material could be considered accessory. For example, providing copies of all the references was very nice, but maybe not entirely necessary for the day-to-day course participation. In addition, it would be useful to provide an alternative source for obtaining the R packages. FYI, the difficulty in installing the `asnipe` package was because it is not actually available from CRAN. It is only downloadable directly from the developers' website.

### **Participant 9 graduate student**

*Interests:* Cooperation, sexual selection and animal personality.

The workshop was very detailed about the statistical methods and easy to follow. Furthermore Mauricio Cantor made an effort to ensure that everyone in the audience was able to follow even the most complex statistical methods making this workshop very appealing for everyone including people less experienced on Social Network analysis. It was great that Mauricio made available all the slides, exercises, examples, papers, tutorials and R scripts. Everything was very well organized and the amazing devotion of Mauricio in this workshop was noticeable and extraordinary. The audience also made a very positive contribution to the workshop by contributing with their own experience on social network analysis, enriching the learning environment of this workshop.

The only negative aspect of this workshop was software related. Most of the audience had problems installing R packages and other software. The internet connection of the hotel where the workshop took place was also very slow making even harder to solve any software related problem.