

Chairman's Message

A broad view towards big science

In the last Newsletter I reported positive developments with the Society's technical programme. This time I want to focus on RSPSoc collaboration with other organisations, new ventures and old, some of which stem originally from cooperation on joint technical meetings.

First, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and in particular its National Centre for Earth Observation (NCEO). The NCEO held its launch event at the start of March 2009 in the Royal Institution in London, showcasing big EO science and featuring a series of heavyweight speakers. I attended the launch, along with various other Council and Society members, and I was impressed. Recent NERC EO research has clearly led to significant developments in global environmental modelling, and the UK has grown a substantial and well-linked research community in this area. Throughout the launch, the NCEO Director, Professor Alan O'Neill, emphasised NCEO's openness for collaboration, encouraging parties with similar interests to engage with them.

So I engaged, managing to grab a quick chat with Prof O'Neill to discuss, initially, NCEO publicity for this year's RSPSoc Annual Lecture, which covers an NCEO-friendly theme (reminder details below). I was also pleased to hear that NCEO is encouraging its participants to present papers at RSPSoc's Annual Conference, rather than NERC holding a separate EO meeting. There is clearly great scope for collaboration between RSPSoc and NCEO, and many individuals are already naturally active in, and members of, both bodies. We should now work hard to realise shared potential, matching NCEO's research endeavours with RSPSoc's mandate to advance knowledge and educate.

Broadening the discussion of RSPSoc collaboration from the UK to Europe, I attended the European Association of Remote Sensing Laboratories (EARSeL) Council meeting in Toulouse in January 2009, representing RSPSoc and the UK community. This was my first such meeting and followed a period of rather lean UK involvement, due to uncertainty over the handover between UK representatives, and I found it quite easy to make a big impact. I reported UK activities (simply submitting a written report before the meeting set the UK apart from most), volunteered an EARSeL Newsletter article featuring a UK laboratory (if any lab other than Nottingham wish to be featured, do let me know) and offered EARSeL members the RSPSoc registration rate at the Nottingham Object-Based Landscape Analysis (OBLA) meeting (this small gesture earned a round of applause!).

I found the meeting useful and it was particularly interesting to see how EARSeL faces the same difficulties as RSPSoc in prising members from the shackles of their day jobs to tackle RSPSoc chores. Both societies rely on volunteers and I'm heartened to see how well RSPSoc fares in benefiting from the very great efforts of its Council, Committee and SIG members. (A warning – I plan to return to this theme in the next Newsletter, urging young Society members to get involved with Committee activities!) RSPSoc and EARSeL share many activities and interests, and again this probably represents untapped potential. As a simple example, I sent targeted publicity mailings for the OBLA meeting via EARSeL's distribution lists. The response exceeded all expectations, with a large proportion of papers and registered delegates hailing from EARSeL institutions. EARSeL's great strength is its Special Interest Groups and I encourage RSPSoc members with suitable interests to factor these into their research activities.

Finally, from Europe to the world, and the International Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS). I'm sure most RSPSoc members are well aware of the many activities we have in ISPRS, in Council, Technical Commissions, Working Groups, publications and so on, so I won't cover these again. Instead, just one matter to report, a little closer to home. We have applied to the UK's Royal Society for representation on their Scientific Unions Committee and asking them to consider contributing towards the UK subscription to ISPRS. Success in this would increase RSPSoc's profile and influence as a scientific body in the UK. My thanks to Samantha Lavender, Chairman of the External

Affairs Committee, for leading this initiative, supported strongly by Ian Dowman and Paul Newby.

To close then, a return to our own big science, and the RSPSoc Annual Lecture taking place on 7 April 2009 at the University of Nottingham. The speaker is Professor John Townshend of the University of Maryland, USA, and the theme is 'Challenges and Opportunities for Terrestrial Earth Observation'. This event is free and there is no need to register, so feel free to come along – details are on the website. The associated RSPSoc Conversazione event at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground does require registration, so if you're interested in this, please contact the RSPSoc office.

Paul Aplin

paul.aplin@nottingham.ac.uk