

The Spatial Ecology Programme

The Spatial Ecology Programme (SEP) was established in the Department of Ecology and Systematics, University of Helsinki, in 1998, with funding from the national research council (Academy of Finland). SEP aims at uniting and facilitating research and training in spatial ecology, including metapopulation biology, conservation and landscape ecology, large-scale spatial population dynamics and population genetics. A framework for spatial ecology research and training is sought by providing shared services, resources and laboratory facilities to research groups and visitors at the department. SEP's chief activities include a visitors' programme, scientific meetings and workshops and post-graduate level training courses.

Since 1998, SEP has hosted 51 visiting scientists representing 18 nationalities. Most visitors have been from the United States (11) and the United Kingdom (5), but scientist from as far as India, China and Japan have also been hosted. The length of a typical visit has been 2–3 weeks, but visits of up to three months have been common. SEP has also made funding available for four post-doctoral researchers. SEP's activities are coordinated by Dr. Johan Kotze, and a steering-committee consisting of professors Ilkka Hanski, Juha Merilä, Jari Niemelä, Esa Ranta and Lotta Sundström.

During 1998–2002, SEP has arranged eight international meetings, the last two of them being the conference *Extinction Thresholds: Insights from Ecology, Genetics, Epidemiology and Behaviour*, featured in this volume (Benton 2003), and a workshop on *Metapopulation Biology – Achievements and Challenges* (February 2003). The previous meetings include *Global Biodiversity and its Monitoring: Focus on Insects* (April 1998), and *Evolution of Dispersal* (October 1998; see Dieckmann *et al.* 1999). In September of 1999 a highly successful conference was held on *Habitat Loss: Ecological, Genetic and Evolutionary Consequences* (see Sih *et al.* 2000). This conference hosted eight plenary lectures, 94 oral presentations and 26 poster presentations. In November 2000, two smaller workshops were organised, one on *Urban Spatial Ecology*, and the other one on *Population Extinction: Processes, Patterns and Explanations*. A workshop entitled *Genetic Analysis of Populations: the Importance of Population Dynamics and Demography* was held in 2001. In 2002 SEP supported the *Eight Meeting of Ph.D. Students in Evolutionary Biology* that was held in Lohja, Finland, and a post-graduate statistics course on *Animal and Generalised Linear Mixed Models – a Practical Approach*.

To participate in the continued activities of the Spatial Ecology Programme, please consult our website (www.helsinki.fi/ml/ekol/spatial_ecology.html) for further information.

References

- Benton, T. 2003: Understanding the ecology of extinction: are we close to the critical threshold? — *Ann. Zool. Fennici* 40: 71–80.
- Dieckmann, U., O'Hara, B. & Weisser, W. 1999: The evolutionary ecology of dispersal. — *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 14: 88–90.
- Sih, A., Jonsson, B. G. & Luikart, G. 2000: Habitat loss: ecological, evolutionary and genetic consequences. — *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 15: 132–134.