



## ENCODE findings challenge views about human genome

The ENCyclopedia Of DNA Elements (ENCODE) people at the EBI have published the results of a two-and-a-half year project to build a 'parts list' of all functional elements in 1% of the human genome. The findings, published in *Nature* on 14 June, challenge the traditional view of the human genetic blueprint as a tidy collection of independent genes, pointing instead to a network in which genes, regulatory elements and other DNA sequences interact in complex, overlapping ways.

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## Do you want to brush up on your skills?

Are you looking for a new challenge? Want to boost your career prospects? Then sign up for the new EMBL Non-Scientific Training and Development programme. This initiative provides courses and training resources for complementary, non-scientific skills to help you progress in your career and enhance your professional aptitude for your daily work at EMBL. The programme, launched by EICAT and EMBL Administration, is aimed at scientists and non-scientists alike.



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## Behind the scenes at the cafeteria

There are lots of people at all the EMBL sites who do much to make the scientists' lives easier and more comfortable; housekeepers, catering staff, bottle washers, store keepers and drivers, to name just a few. One of them, Shantha Rajasooriya or Shan to his friends, has been working in the cafeteria at EMBL Heidelberg since leaving his native Sri Lanka, and he talks about what it's really like to cater for hundreds of hungry researchers every day.

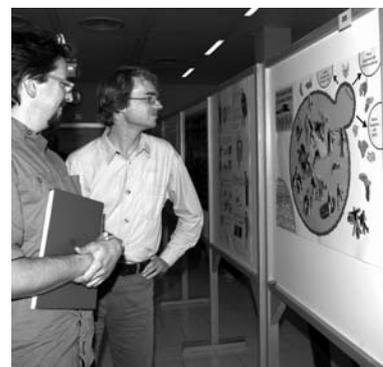
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## Mice providing some answers to human questions

EMBL scientists working with the mouse model have been uncovering answers to a couple of the most perplexing mysteries of modern life. Firstly, why does eating the same things make some of us fatter than others? The answer could be the Bsx molecule, as Mathias Treier and his group at EMBL Heidelberg have found. When Bsx is lacking in mice, they are a lot lazier and display less food-seeking behaviour. Secondly, why are some people prone to anxiety? Cornelius Gross at EMBL Monterotondo and his group have shown that mice lacking the serotonin receptor 1A have problems processing ambiguous stimuli (a tone which is only *sometimes* followed by an electric shock, for example), reacting to them with fully-fledged fear responses. Both Bsx and neural circuits that govern fundamental behaviours like fear are often conserved between species, so these findings could open up new avenues for therapies.

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## "It's good, isn't it?"



Posters, food, talks, music and a group of very relieved PhD students: it could only be Lab Day. More pictures inside.

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## Lab Day '07

You know you're getting older when PhD students look 15, EMBL parties go on too late and Lab Day seems to come around quicker every year. 12 June was that time again, with the traditional programme of poster sessions\*, talks, music and the PhD graduation ceremony. Many visitors from the outstations made the trip, and there was much networking to be done and old friends to catch up with over coffee, lunch and a barbecue dinner. Thanks to everyone who was involved in the organisation and made Lab Day another resounding success.

\*The winners of the poster competition were the Arendt and Pepperkok labs and the EBI predocs.

## Granting wishes

To cope with ever-increasing demand, the Grants Office is implementing a new e-mail system which will ensure that all requests and queries are dealt with as quickly as possible. After sending an e-mail request to a central address, [grants@embl.org](mailto:grants@embl.org), users from both the main lab and the outstations will receive a 'ticket' number and will be able to track the progress of their query.

It's all part of the upgrade of the Grants Office services, which will include an updated webpage that's in line with the EMBL look and feel. The site will provide information in a clear and easily navigable way, and will be targeted to the specific needs of the users. For example, it will be easy to pinpoint relevant grants for outstation-based scientists; and there will be access to 'ResearchResearch', an online resource which lists grants from all over the world. The website is in its final phase of testing and will be available online from the beginning of July.



Photos: Christine Panagiotidis

## Everything you always wanted to learn but were afraid to ask

Are you looking for a new challenge? Do you want to brush up on your skills? Do you want to boost your career prospects for the time after EMBL? Curious about how to 'survive' an interview in the industry sector?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, why not sign up for the new EMBL Non-Scientific Training and Development programme? This initiative provides courses and training resources for the development of complementary, non-scientific skills to help you progress in your career, and also enhance your professional aptitude for your daily work at EMBL.

Courses planned so far include:

- The Effective Team Leader
- Effective Writing
- Project Management
- Presenting Skills
- IT Courses (Excel, Access, etc.)

The programme, an initiative launched by the EMBL International Centre for Advanced Training (EICAT) and EMBL Administration, is aimed at scientists and non-scientists alike, at all levels. It will enable EMBL staff members to develop relevant transferable skills to help them build careers elsewhere after their time here.

The EMBL Non Scientific Training and Development programme is available to Staff members, Ancillaries and Fellows. Courses can be made available at any EMBL site as long as there is a minimum of five participants.

The new website, [www.embl.org/non-scientifictraining](http://www.embl.org/non-scientifictraining), offers course information and e-learning packages. A first round of courses will run from September to December 2007, led by instructors who have been to EMBL and adapted their material specifically for the lab. If a course you would like to attend is not on the list yet, go ahead and suggest it. As long as it can be beneficial for other staff members, is

'non-scientific' in nature and we can find a suitable instructor, we will endeavour to organise the course at your location.

Most of the training courses advertised on the site are subsidised, and the only expense incurred by attendees would be travel and subsistence in the case of a course being held at a different duty station.

However, there will be some courses which command a fee, and participants will be requested to seek permission from the local budget holder prior to submitting an application form. This will be clearly indicated on the website.

"Complementary skills training for scientists, particularly young scientists, is of increasing importance for career advancement," says EMBL DG Iain Mattaj. "EMBL is however a special case because our turnover system makes it necessary that we provide training opportunities to all our staff on an equal basis."

– Rebecca West

## EMBL Hamburg in the EU spotlight

EMBL Hamburg was among the proud hosts of the EU's annual European Conference on Research Infrastructures (ECRI 2007) on 5-6 June.

Several ministers, including EU commissioner Janez Potočnik, heard talks by EMBL DG Iain Mattaj and EBI Director Janet Thornton at the meeting held on the DESY campus. As part of the programme, the outstation organised two tours, the first for journal-

ists from all over Europe and the second for participants of ECRI. "Both tours were well attended with about twenty participants each," says Head of EMBL Hamburg Matthias Wilmanns (right), who described the basics of structural biology to the visitors and outlined the plans for the new beamlines at PETRA-III.

The ECRI meeting aims to provide valuable feedback for FP7 and Europe's 'roadmap' of research infrastructures.



Photo: Nicola Porter

## behindthescenes

### "Your hunger is the key to our success"

You see them every day. They put a spring in your step with a morning croissant, fortify you at lunchtime and make the afternoon seem less endless with their tempting cakes. They save you from starving during a late night in the lab and provide a delicious spread at the drop of a hat to impress your guests. The cafeteria staff are always there for us. But what's it really like to cater for hundreds of hungry scientists every day?

"You're not surviving because of us – we're surviving because of you!" protests Shantha Rajasooriya, or Shan as he is known to most people. He's been a kitchen help in the cafeteria at EMBL Heidelberg since he came to Germany 11 years ago from his native Sri Lanka, and as one of the longest-serving members of the five-strong team is a familiar face to many, past and present. "The greater your hunger, the greater my job security. Though it's hard work and can be stressful at times, we always like to see you coming back when you're hungry and thirsty. The main thing is that there's always something available for you."

So how does it all work behind the scenes while we're tucking into *kaffee und kuchen*? "Every day we make 200 croissants, 200 sandwiches and 150 pretzels, as well as the cakes.

We cater for the symposia, workshops, courses, visitors, meetings and partly for the Kinderhaus. That's on top of serving people as they come to the cafeteria, and it's all done by five people within 12 square metres," explains Shan. "There's not even space to put a finger anywhere."

The cafeteria and canteen operate as two separate entities under Chef Claus Himburg, but the fifth cafeteria staff member goes up to the canteen at lunchtime to help – which is why you sometimes see Shan behind the scenes up there, too. Morning shift starts at 7am. "Unlike the rest of the staff I prefer the afternoon one, so I can do the housework in the morning. The good thing about this job is the working hours – I can help take our child to school and look after him when my wife is working or travelling," says Shan.

Shan met his German wife in Sri Lanka and they decided quite suddenly to move to Germany before the birth of their child. "We

felt it wasn't appropriate to bring children up in Sri Lanka, because of the unrest," says Shan. "It was very difficult at first; I spoke not a single word of German, and it was a real culture shock. Everything happened very fast. I would have prepared myself by taking lessons if I had known earlier."

Shan found work at EMBL very quickly, but it took a while to integrate into his new home. "Germany is like another world. Coming from an island we were really cut off, and Europe's borders are fascinating to me. One centimetre and everything is different!" he laughs.

"At EMBL I soon began to realise that I had come to a very special place. Everyone's from a different land or culture, with different likes and dislikes. Talking to people, I started having fun. Everyone's in the same boat landing at EMBL, and as I spoke English that helped encourage people to come to me about things, knowing I was a foreigner too."

Shan still stays in contact with many people who have left. "The list is getting longer every year," he smiles. "I always think of EMBL as a family."

But it's not all fun and games, as is evident on any rainy afternoon. "We do get stressed; there are 500-600 people per day coming to the cafeteria and only 32 chairs," says Shan. "As well as that, people coming in also face harassment from the chocolate stand in the way or a loaded trolley in the door.

"But people are very cooperative. No matter who comes from whatever part of the world, everyone is very patient. People from different countries have different eating habits and times but most see that we have to try to cater for so many tastes.

"Our department is the most under scrutiny at EMBL. But most people know that we're doing our best. It's very rare that people complain. They see that it's an important social environment too; a chance to get away from the bench or desk and recharge your batteries."

"I always think of EMBL  
as a family"



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis

# Barbies for girls, microscopes for boys?

When I started my job as scientific manager for the 3D Repertoire project, I realised that the gender imbalance, especially in top level positions, is a particular problem in science. What can be done? To get more information, I attended the conference 'Women in Science: The Way Forward', held at EMBL Heidelberg on 9-11 May 2007.

The conference was organised as part of the EU project SET-Routes, a collaboration between EMBL, CERN and EMBO funded under FP6 to encourage more girls to pursue a career in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET). More than 200 participants, mainly women, attended this two-and-a-half day event, with contributions from biologists, chemists, psychologists, representatives of renowned scientific institutions and grant agencies. Some speakers also came from the other side of the Atlantic. The conference was followed by training for the new SET-Routes ambassadors (see below, *SET-Routes: How can I get involved?*).

Keynote speaker Rosalind Chait Barnett is Research Director in Women's Studies at Brandeis University, Massachusetts. Negative gender messages – Barbies and cooking sets for girls, cars and microscopes for boys – affect children early, influencing their future choices of career. Awareness of gender stereotypes



needs to increase among parents and teachers, who have such a determinant role in the first steps of children's education.

The first session presented some examples of initiatives aiming to increase the percentage of women in science. The Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard Foundation targets young woman scientists with children, allowing them to afford support (babysitting, household help, a washing machine, etc.) and keep up with laboratory work. Other initiatives include the Marie Heim-Vögtlin subsidies (Switzerland), the MuT programme (Mentoring and Training for women) and the Center of Excellence: Women and Science (both Germany).

Committees play a fundamental role in selecting the best candidates for positions, and in order to avoid discrimination it's crucial to select gender-balanced, 'human-diverse' committees. It's also essential to make the committee members aware of general biases. Brian Nosek from the University of Virginia pointed

out the persistence of 'mind bugs', implicit stereotypes that often guide our behaviour without conscious control.

Ragnhild Sohlberg, Vice-President of Norsk Hydro, presented the policies implemented in Scandinavia since the late 1960s: paid maternity and paternity leave, parent allowance, child care facilities, flexible working hours. Despite all this, women professors are still a minority, so reconciliation between family and career can't be the only cause of the observed gender gap. Recently, Norway approved a new law that requires a minimum of 40% women represented on the board of directors of public companies. But are quotas an answer to the problem?

The focus of the last session was on how to motivate women to remain in research by changing institutional cultures. A research centre such as EMBL, where great emphasis is put on training, networking, collaborations and measures to combine family and research, offers a stimulating environment for all scientists to develop a career. Nadia Rosenthal, Head of EMBL Monterotondo, stressed how crucial it is to eliminate discrimination and preserve the passion of women for science, for example, by a good mentoring programme.

At the end of the conference, my own take-home message was that the 'way forward' will involve multiple parallel activities at the individual level, by changing our still strong implicit gender stereotypes; at a school and institutional level, by providing training and excellent mentoring; at the national level, by guaranteeing protective and efficient infrastructures; and at the European and international level, by creating fair committees and equal opportunities.

And the Gender Action Plan for 3D Repertoire? We will provide information and mentoring (most of the women group leaders accepted enthusiastically to act as mentors for young researchers). In addition, three prizes (€2,500 each) will be offered to help researchers to reconcile family life and science.

– Michela Bertero, Serrano Group, CRG  
[www.3dreertoire.org](http://www.3dreertoire.org)

## SET-Routes: How can I get involved?

In the SET-Routes School Ambassador Programme, young female graduates visit schools across Europe to describe their 'life in science' to high-school students. University Ambassadors are top women scientists who share their experience of working in science with undergraduates and postdoctoral students.

If you'd like to become an ambassador or would like to know more about SET-Routes, contact [msantos@embl.de](mailto:msantos@embl.de).



## Babes in the wood

A group of mostly urban-dwelling EMBL Heidelberg Kinderhaus kids have been communing with nature in a three-month "Waldprojekt". The 4-6 year-olds of the Lila Kindergartengruppe ventured into the forest behind EMBL every week between the end of January and the beginning of May to look at the changes in plants, animals and nature that spring brought. Back in the classroom, they catalogued and discussed their discoveries.



## Risky... but never hopeless

It was a tall order: to develop an *in vitro* system for the study of microRNAs. But Matthias Hentze felt Rolf Thermann was up to the challenge, and now nearly four years later the pair at EMBL Heidelberg can proudly present this essential tool to the rest of the scientific world.

"It felt risky at times, but never hopeless," explains Rolf (pictured), who took on the project in September 2003 when he joined Matthias' group as a postdoc. "It was thought that it would be a really, really useful tool to have but not so easy to develop."

Rolf had previously been working in industry, on the purification of hepatitis C components, but despite not having worked with miRNAs before, he was very keen to set himself the challenge.

"I hadn't worked with *Drosophila* before either," he reveals, "and being more of a mammal person I at first pushed to try to develop the system in that direction, but it didn't work. So we said let's try with *Drosophila* but not



spend too much time on it, and if it doesn't work we'll change to a different project – but in actual fact it very quickly worked quite well."

Applying the new system, Rolf was able to see the 'locking' process of miRNAs to messenger RNAs for the first time and discovered that miR2, an important microRNA in *Drosophila*, blocks translation very early on, even before the cellular machinery can assemble. Bound by miR2, a messenger RNA molecule is no longer accessible to ribosomes, the complexes that carry out protein synthesis.

The study can be found in the 16 May online edition of *Nature*. The story has appeared in the mainstream press, including Spain's *El País*, and Rolf has been on German radio. "We've now got a great tool that can help uncover a lot of the mysteries of miRNAs," he says. "The system is there to be used now and the exciting data we've already presented is the starting point of a more in-depth study of mechanisms."

## Mice providing some answers to human questions

EMBL scientists working with the mouse model have been uncovering answers to a couple of the most perplexing mysteries of modern life.

Firstly, why does eating the same things make some of us fatter than others? The answer could be the Bsx molecule, as Mathias Treier and his group at EMBL HD discovered along with the German Institute for Nutrition (DIFE) and a group at the University of Cincinnati. Mice lacking Bsx display less spontaneous physical activity (subconscious movements such as fidgeting), perceive hunger signals differently and have a lower concentration of feeding hormones in their brain than normal mice.

Spontaneous physical activity and food intake, both controlled by the hypothalamus and intrinsically linked, are two crucial factors regulating body weight. When hunger strikes, activity increases and provides the drive to go and find food. "Mice lacking Bsx are a lot lazier, and show less spontaneous activity and less food-seeking behaviour," says Mathias.

Bsx brings about its effect by regulating the expression of feeding hormones NPY and AgRP. Without it, fewer hormones are made, so only rarely do the mice go looking for food even if they have been starving for a long period.

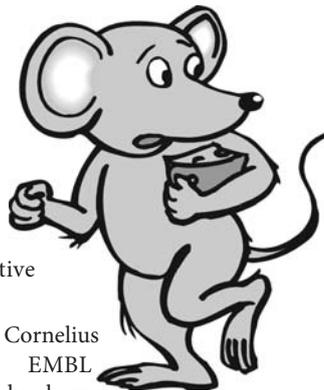
As Bsx is conserved across species, it's likely that it plays a similar role in humans, and that differences in Bsx activity between individuals

could help explain why some people are more active than others.

Meanwhile, Cornelius Gross at EMBL Monterotondo has been finding out why some people sail through life without a care in the world while others are prone to anxiety. His group has shown that a serotonin receptor and a neural circuit in the hippocampus play crucial roles in mediating fear responses in ambiguous situations – those which tend to be *perceived* by anxiety patients as threatening, even though they are not necessarily so.

Mice show less fear towards a stimulus which is only sometimes followed by an electric shock than to clearly threatening stimuli. Those lacking the serotonin receptor 1A, however, have problems processing ambiguous stimuli: they react to them with fully-fledged fear responses. Shutting down a specific circuit in the hippocampus abolished fear reactions only to ambiguous cues.

Neural circuits that govern fundamental behaviours like fear are often conserved between species. "Like our mice, humans with anxiety disorders also overreact to ambiguous situations," Cornelius says. The findings could open up new avenues for therapies.



## New team structure for EBI database groups

The EBI has announced a major reorganisation of its processing of bio-molecular sequence information. Rolf Apweiler's sequence database group, which is responsible for EMBL-Bank (nucleotide sequences) and UniProt (protein sequences), will be merged with Ewan Birney's group, which includes the EBI's part of the Ensembl team.

The new team structure reflects the need to integrate DNA data from an increasing diversity of high-throughput methods, and will be jointly led by Rolf and Ewan, with Rolf taking responsibility for proteins and functional information and Ewan for nucleotides.

The restructuring will allow the groups to capitalise on the strengths of both to do more with the data more efficiently. The well-established global collaborations to collect and exchange nucleotide and protein sequence data will remain an essential part of the operation, and the sequence database group also produces secondary resources to provide users with all the information they need to analyse completely sequenced genomes. "The consolidation allows us to take our collaborative spirit a step further, which will ultimately lead to a unified user interface for all our completed-genome data," says Rolf.

## Trouble at the EBI? The OTT comes to the rescue!



**Previously...**  
 Head of Outreach and Training at EMBL-EBI, Cath Brooksbank, was juggling two phones, two monitors and the work of five people on a daily basis. "When will it end?" she cried.



Luckily for Cath, new Scientific Training Officer Vicky Schneider (left) and Bioinformatics Roadshow co-ordinator Jan Copeland (right) are on hand to manage EBI's on-site and external

training programmes, and offer some relaxing 'Tension Tamer' tea!



**BANG!**  
 Alison Barker (left), administrator for the Outreach and Training Team (OTT), and new Scientific Outreach Officer Louisa Wright (right) lessen Cath's workload even further.



**WALLOP!**  
 With outreach and training activities divided among the group, everyone even has time for the occasional coffee break!

Photos: L. Wright, V. Schneider, M. Shiojatalab

Next month: Spiderman averts disaster at the Monterotondo mouse house (possibly)...

## ENCODE findings challenge views about human genome

The ENCyclopedia Of DNA Elements (ENCODE) people at the EBI have published the results of a two-and-a-half year project to build a 'parts list' of all functional elements in 1% of the human genome, uncovering some big surprises related to the organisation and function of our genetic blueprint.

The findings, featured on the cover of *Nature* on 14 June and covered extensively in the mainstream press, challenge the traditional view of the human genetic blueprint as a tidy collection of independent genes, pointing instead to a network in which genes, regulatory elements and other DNA sequences interact in complex, overlapping ways.

"In particular, we gained significant insight into DNA sequences that do not encode proteins. We found that there's much more transcription occurring than previously thought,"

says joint head of the project Ewan Birney, who led the data integration and analysis effort. "In fact, there are tenfold more start sites than genes. Contrary to traditional views, many previously unrecognised start sites for transcription and regulatory sequences are located not only upstream but also downstream of transcription start sites."

Another discovery was that half of the functional elements in the human genome do not appear to have been constrained during evolution, suggesting that many species' genomes contain functional elements or 'neutral events' that are neither important nor selected against in terms of survival and reproduction.

This was only the pilot phase of the ENCODE project, an international research consortium organised by the National Human Genome Research Institute (NHGRI), part of

the National Institutes of Health (NIH). During the next couple of years the project, which involves 35 groups from 80 organisations, will be scaled up to the entire genome. As well as paving the way for future efforts and challenging long-held views about genes and what they do, the findings could have significant implications on efforts to identify DNA sequences involved in many human diseases.

In addition, ENCODE researchers and the BioSapiens Network of Excellence have investigated how RNA transcripts are processed in human cells. They found that alternative splicing, where the same RNA transcript can be cut at two or more different positions to make different products, is very common in humans. It is unlikely, however, that alternative splicing adds much to the variety of functions and structures among proteins.



## the EMBO corner

### The first farewell

Since the start of EMBL&cetera, one corner of the publication has been set aside for EMBO news. I have contributed to this forum on many occasions, communicating EMBO's activities to the newsletter's broad scientific and non-scientific audience. Now, as I get ready to move on from EMBO, I would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye to the EMBL community – a 'first farewell' because, although I leave EMBO in July, my connections with EMBL as a scientist and group leader will continue for another year.

My relationship with the 'EMBs' has been a long one. I first came to Heidelberg in 1994, working simultaneously as EMBO Executive Director and EMBL Scientific Coordinator. This was a tremendously enriching period and the breadth of my work as EMBL's Dean of Graduate Studies, and Coordinator of Technology Transfer and the Structures and Biocomputing Programme, alongside a myriad other tasks, allowed me to integrate rapidly and deeply into the world of EMBL. As EMBO activities grew over the years, I turned my



focus to EMBO and my work at EMBL continued as a senior scientist and group leader.

This collective 'EMB' experience is an interesting metaphor for interaction between the two organisations. EMBO and EMBL have always worked side by side, not just geographically but also in philosophy. The organisations have been inextricably linked ever since EMBO took the first steps towards creating the laboratory in the 1960s – and even more so since EMBL's foundation in the 1970s. Initially much of EMBO's focus was directed towards delivering and promoting the laboratory, but in the past decade, with EMBL now a mature entity, EMBO has concentrated on developing its own activities.

During this time, the naturally strong links between the organisations have flourished. EMBO has been able to learn from EMBL, and vice versa. One such example is the EMBO Young Investigator Programme, which was inspired in part by the success of early-stage independent group leaders at EMBL. The contribution of EMBL to EMBO's Courses, Workshops and Conferences has also been

crucial to the continued strength of that programme and EMBO's Science & Society Programme has become closely linked to EMBL's subsequent work in this area.

Ensuring the independence of both organisations, while recognising their interdependence, has not always been easy. Overall this interrelationship has been handled with transparency, with the goal for all concerned the enrichment of the molecular life sciences in Europe. As I leave EMBO, I do so in the belief that the physical proximity of the organisations will continue to be not merely symbolic, but characteristic of a close working relationship. Recognising differences is important, but it is perhaps more important to ensure that these do not stand in the way of co-operation – but rather help both organisations to reach their maximum potential.

As my time at EMBO draws to a close, it is some comfort to know that my work with EMBL will continue for one more year. I look forward to returning frequently, not only to continue my research but also to meet the many friends I have made at both organisations over the years.

– Frank Gannon

*In July, Frank will hand over to Hermann Bujard, who joined EMBO as Deputy Executive Director in February 2007. He will lead the organisation until the next Executive Director is appointed. The German-born molecular biologist has been an EMBO Member since 1976 and was an EMBO Council member from 1989-1995.*

### Something fishy in the PCF

We don't tend to get many 'fish nutritionists' coming through our doors, but Yannis Kotzamanis, visiting the Proteomic Core Facility from the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research in Athens, is just that. He's working to produce novel diets for edible fish, in particular sea bream and sea bass, and is interested in protein differentiation in the muscles or other tissues of those fed with a plant protein and oil, substitutes to fish meal and fish oil respectively.

"With the decline of fish stocks all over the world and the growing demand of Aquaculture and domestic animal production for fish meal, costs are rising, and we need to develop a sustainable alternative to fish meal that has no detrimental effects on fish health or muscle growth," Yannis explains. "In the long run, my work here at EMBL is also very important for human nutrition – what happens to the fish can have huge effects on consumer safety. It's great to be able to use the advanced equipment and technologies of the Proteomics Core Facility. I hope that we'll sustain the collaboration."

"That was a yummy project," commented Core Facility head Thomas Franz.



### Turkish delight

On 19 May, Turkish food, music and dance took over the EMBL Heidelberg canteen at the latest in the main lab's international parties. The Turkish contingent worked hard to provide a delicious spread of mezes and other specialities, while dancers showed everyone some traditional moves on the dancefloor. In true EMBL style, everyone else was eager to get up and have a go too.



## News from the Alumni Association

## EMBL alumni plan to help young scientists in Greece



At their first meeting in Greece on 21-22 April, seventeen EMBL alumni discussed ways to inspire young scientists in their country. In the beautiful setting of Dilofo, Ioannina, attendees gave short presentations on their current scientific work, and summarised their professional and personal lives since leaving EMBL.

The most important outcome of the meeting was the decision to hold local chapter meetings in Greece twice a year. Firstly, in May, an informal gathering in Difolo will allow alumni and members of their research groups to discuss their projects with others. As one of the goals is to inspire young scientists, it was agreed that graduate students and postdocs would be encouraged to attend this meeting.

A second meeting later in the year will accompany the annual conference of the Hellenic Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (HSBMB), which is normally held in November and alternates between Athens and other major Greek university cities. The Greek alumni agreed to invite EMBO Members and Young Investigators working in Greece to present talks and discuss their work with young scientists at this satellite meeting, which would be open to all attendees of the HSBMB conference.

As in many chapter meetings, the seventeen Greek alumni also concentrated on career development and repatriation problems after leaving EMBL, and how to retain their links to the Laboratory and its services. And, like many alumni, they are keen to improve science in their own country, con-

sidering how to get involved as a group in influencing the education system in Greece. With the plan now to meet twice annually, they are likely to make great progress.

For more information on Alumni local chapter meetings please visit [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/chapters/index.html](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/chapters/index.html).

– *Organiser: Anastasia Politou*  
*Report: Caroline Hadley*

Please mark your diaries with the following alumni events and opportunities:

- The **First German Local Chapter Meeting**, Heidelberg, will be held in conjunction with the EMBL Summer Party on Saturday 14 July 2007. Speakers include Matthias Hentze, Christoph Niehrs, Gaia Tavosanis, Marek Cyrklaff and Ralf Jansen. See the programme at [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/chapters/germany\\_meeting\\_july2007.html](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/chapters/germany_meeting_july2007.html) for more details.
- **EMBO World Practical Course** on DNA Microarray: Analysis and Application, Tamilnadu, India, 11-16 August. Speakers include Vladimir Benes, Jochen Wittbrodt, George Reid, Jonathon Blake, Ute Wirkner, Christian Schwager, Luis Teran, Parag Sadhale, Mugasimangalam Raja and Prakash Vincent. For details see <http://cwp.embo.org/wpc07-05>.
- **EMBL Alumni** at the 2007 ELSO Meeting, Dresden, 2 September. Talks by Matthias Hentze, Daniel Louvard and Kai Simons begin at 18:45 in Konferenzraum 5 of the Maritim Hotel & Internationales Congress Center, with free refreshments. See also [www.elseo.org](http://www.elseo.org), and contact [alumni@embl.de](mailto:alumni@embl.de) if you would like to attend.
- Please also remember that the application deadline for the **John Kendrew Young Scientist Award** is Friday 14 September. If you would like to nominate a former EMBL pre- or postdoc for the award of €1,000 or would like to apply directly, see [www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/services/index.html#kendrew](http://www.embl.org/aboutus/alumni/services/index.html#kendrew) for more details.

In cooperation with the International Music Festival *Heidelberger Frühling*, EMBL hosted celebrated pianist Ragna Schirmer on 19 April with a recital of Bach's Goldberg Variations. The charity concert, organised by Klaus Scheffzek in aid of Helfer Ohne Grenzen e.V., took over €2,600 in donations. More than 300 music lovers packed the Operon, which was beautifully decorated with tulips in the style of this year's *Heidelberger Frühling* brand design. Thanks very much to Building Maintenance for all their help in giving the evening a lovely setting, as well as everybody else who got involved. A special thank you goes to sponsors EMBO, EMBLEM and EMBL Ventures. Visit [www.embl.de/music](http://www.embl.de/music) for more details about this and other music events.



Charity begins in the Operon

## newsinbrief

□ **Applications are open** for EMBL's new Interdisciplinary Postdoc (EIPOD) positions, aimed at promoting interdisciplinary research, from 15 June to 31 August. Visit [www.embl.org/training/eipod](http://www.embl.org/training/eipod) for details.

□ **After the success of** last year's first Career Options Day, EMBL hosted the second on 11 June. Organised by EICAT and EMBLEM, the event provided an overview of alternative, non-academic career possibilities. Speakers giving an insight into their day-to-day working lives included Rainer Wessel, president and CEO of Ganymed Pharmaceuticals, Alison Abbott, senior European correspondent at *Nature*, and patent attorney Jan Krauss.

□ **As a result of the** chimney design competition in issue 37, the world's biggest microtubule now stands at the back of the main lab in Heidelberg (left). After several suggestions that it should be a microtubule, a stylised version was devised by OIPA's graphic designer Petra Riedinger and made a reality by Building Maintenance's Shira Trachtenberg. (It's actually two shades of EMBL green with red dots (representing Malp3), so this picture doesn't do it justice).



□ **Heidelberg's new Oberbürgermeister** (mayor), Dr. Eckart Würzner, visited EMBL on 13 April to learn about the lab. Iain Mattaj outlined the history and current status of EMBL, and Dr. Würzner was



Iain and Mayor Würzner

given a tour of the Core Facilities. After lunch he learnt about EMBO from acting Executive Director Hermann Bujard.

□ **A delegation of six** visited EMBL Heidelberg from pharmaceutical company Novartis on 21 May. They are setting up a new research campus in Basel and were interested to find out about EMBL's facilities and organisation. During lunch they met EMBL researchers and gave them some insight into what it's like to work for a large pharma company.

□ **The EBI's SYMBIOmatics** project, an EU-funded Specific Support Action coordinated by Graham Cameron, was selected as 'eHealth project of the month' in May by the European Commission's Information Society portal.

□ **EMBL-Bank, the nucleotide** sequence database maintained by the EBI, celebrated its 25th anniversary on 22 May. It was the world's first public database of DNA and RNA sequences and remains Europe's pri-

mary resource, containing over 96 million entries corresponding to 170 gigabases of sequence from over 280,000 organisms. New sequences are submitted at a rate of more than one every two seconds, and the database receives millions of hits per day. Today, half an hour at the computer can suggest a function for a new gene, a task that might have previously occupied a researcher for a year.

□ **A cross-EBI summer** project, the first of its kind, is taking place from 11 June onwards. In an initiative entitled 'FIND: Functional INtegration of Data – the synapse and the brain', each research group has taken an undergraduate student to work on a common project from their own approach. The students will work together, each supervised by a member of their host group, to gather and integrate as much knowledge as possible about the components and interactions of the glutamate NMDA receptor complex, one of the main molecular devices responsible for learning and memory.

□ **A preliminary meeting** was organised for the first time between the Heads of Units and Scientific Advisory Committee on 11 May, the afternoon before the annual SAC meeting. Both parties welcomed the opportunity to meet each other in an informal way outside of the normal reviews, and such meetings are going to be continued.

□ **The German Dietmar-Hopp** Stiftung has donated €500,000 to the Advanced Training Centre. The money will be used to equip the teaching laboratory.

## from the Staff Association

• **Don't forget this year's Summer Party** on Saturday 14 July. This event is free to all EMBL staff and alumni and their families; please bring your EMBL ID and accompany your visitors. During the Party, we will be holding this year's tombola draw. Prizes include iPods, a 19" Dell flat-screen monitor, weekend car rentals (Audi, VW and Volvo), golf green fees, a "Golf Experience Day", weekends at hotels, meals at restaurants and much more. Tickets will be on sale soon (and on the day) for €2 each, and proceeds will go to the Waldpiraten camp ([www.waldpiraten.de](http://www.waldpiraten.de)) for children with cancer. Last year's tombola raised €2,000.

• **Following April's elections**, we would like to welcome the following new representatives on the Staff Association committee:

HD: Vladimir Benes (Group Leader)  
Peter Everitt (Technician)  
Maryline Delmas (Ancillary)

Gregor Reither (Postdoc)  
Anne-Marie Glynn (Predoc)

EBI: Martin Taylor  
Heidi Dvinge

We'd like to thank all the representatives who stepped down this year. A special thanks goes to the familiar faces of Gareth Griffiths (co-chair), Georg Ritter (vice chair) and Tom Cord (treasurer) who represented the interests of staff for many years. Thanks also to Janin Topaloglu, Carlo Carolis, Fabiana Renzi, Emily Dimmer (EBI) and Sarah Hunter (EBI) for their work. We would also like to thank Annabel Goulding and Monique Cuq-Beutler from the Election Committee, as well as Anne Walter, Li-Jung Hoefler-Wu and Tina Müller for helping with this year's elections.

• **Keep up-to-date** with Staff Association events at [www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/](http://www.embl-heidelberg.de/~staff/).

– Catherine Floyd



There was an awful lot of smiling and handshaking for Staff Association chair Doros Panayi to do on 25 May when Georg (top), Gareth (left), Tom (right) and the other Staff Association reps stepped down to make way for the new faces.



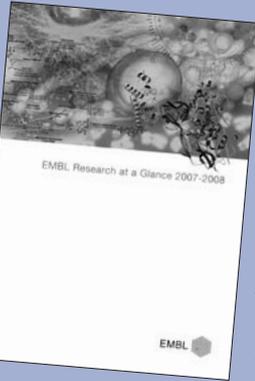
**Dónal O'Carroll** is joining EMBL Monterotondo as a Group Leader on 1 July, where he will be looking at microRNA-mediated regulation of hematopoiesis. Born in Dublin, Dónal did his undergraduate studies at Trinity College before completing a PhD at the IMP in Vienna. He's currently a postdoc at The Rockefeller University in New York. As well as looking forward to starting his own group, he can't wait to move to Monterotondo for the food, outdoor life and proximity to Rome, and is also looking forward to being part of the "fantastic" institution that is EMBL.

**Jörg Fleckenstein** is EMBL's new Senior Manager for Resource Development – in other words, he's the man responsible for philanthropic income and fundraising. After spending eight years in Britain, doing a similar job for City University in London, he has come back to the area of Germany where he grew up. "After living in London, Heidelberg might have been quite a culture shock, but the international mix and cosmopolitan atmosphere of EMBL makes up for it," he says. Previously Jörg, who studied International Relations, spent time in Bosnia providing humanitarian and development aid after the war.



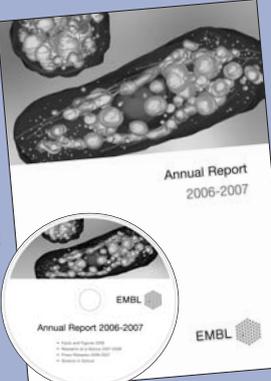
**Andrea Lechner** is the first dedicated personnel officer for EMBL-EBI. Bavarian by birth, Andrea went to England in 1988 to work as an au pair and improve her English – and never returned to Germany. Before joining EMBL-EBI she worked in human resources for King's College London, among other places. "The EBI is getting very big so it was decided to expand the personnel team to have a dedicated officer there," she explains. "I spent May in Heidelberg learning the ropes." Being a real city girl, Andrea will be commuting every day to EMBL-EBI from her home in north-east London.

**Martin Kirch** replaces Emmanuelle Guillant as Senior Administrative Officer at EMBL Heidelberg from 15 June.



## Read all about it!

This year's annual EMBL publications are coming off the presses now. You can pick up copies of the Annual Report 2006-2007 and Research at a Glance 2007-2008 from the OIPA corridor from 5 July, and outstations will receive copies by mail. Both publications are available on a DVD alongside Facts and Figures 2006, and this is also available from OIPA.



## awards&honours

EBI staff member **Richard Bourgon** (Huber group) and PhD student **Juanma Vaquerizas** (Luscombe group) have recently been elected as junior research fellows at Wolfson College, Cambridge University. The prestigious fellowships are open to anyone who is about to get a PhD or who got one recently. "Our main duties as junior research fellows are to undertake postdoc work and to promote scholarship in our subject to the best of our ability. Richard was elected as Junior Research Fellow in Statistics, and I was elected as Junior Research Fellow in Genomics and Bioinformatics," explains Juanma. "These fellowships are very prestigious and I would like to congratulate Richard and Juanma on their personal success. This also helps to cement EBI's links with the university," said EBI Director Janet Thornton.

*29 June EMBL Heidelberg*

**EMBL Distinguished Visitor Lecture:** Joachim Frank, HHMI. "The Ribosome – A Molecular Machine in Motion, as Visualized by Cryo-Electron Microscopy"

*2-5 July EMBL Hamburg*

**Summer Council Meeting**

*4-6 July EMBL Heidelberg*

ELLS LearningLAB

*10-13 July EMBL Heidelberg*

**Course:** A joint EMBL/Agilent Technologies practical course on Gene Expression Analysis

*10-15 July EMBL Hamburg*

**Course:** BioXAS Practical Course on metalloproteins and organism tissue

*14 July EMBL Heidelberg*

**Staff Association Summer Party**

*20 July EMBL Heidelberg*

**Concert:** US pianist and harpsichordist Mark Kroll. Music by Beethoven, Couperin, Scarlatti, Mozart and Hummel.

*22-31 August EMBL Heidelberg*

**Course:** EMBO Practical Course on Methods in Cell Biology: Exploring the Dynamics of Cellular Organisation

*2-8 Sept EMBL Heidelberg*

**Course:** EMBO Practical Course on Chromatin Immunoprecipitation and related techniques

*12-16 Sept EMBL Heidelberg*

**Conference:** EMBO Conference on Protein Synthesis and Translational Control (in partnership with Cold Spring Harbor Lab)

*17-19 Sept EMBL Heidelberg*

**Joint EMBL/Affymetrix Exon Arrays Workshop:** From Experiment to Biological Understanding

*18-19 Sept EMBL Monterotondo*

**Heads of Units Meeting/Senior Scientists Meeting/Faculty Retreat**

For more events, visit [www.embl.org/events](http://www.embl.org/events)

EMBL will be advertising itself with a stand at several scientific conferences over the coming months. They include:

- FEBS, July 7-12, Vienna
- ISMB/ECCB, 21-25 July, Vienna
- BSR, 13-17 Aug, Manchester
- ELSO, 1-4 Sept, Dresden
- ISCB 2007, 1-6 Oct, Long Beach, CA

"Maintaining a presence at important scientific events is crucial to promote EMBL as an attractive place to work," says Lena Raditsch, Head of OIPA.