



# The New Zealand Statistical Association Newsletter

Number 94

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# President's Welcome

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by JOHN HAYWOOD



Kia ora koutou,

Welcome to this first 2026 issue of the NZSA Newsletter! I hope everyone has thrived in their own way(s) since our last issue, and it was great to see many of you at the 2025 NZSA Conference in Dunedin last December. A big shout out to the whole organising team, led by Conor Kresin, and also to our two newly elected Life Members, Ken Dodds and John Harraway. You can read a report about the 2025 Conference from Conor later in this Newsletter, and also see my citations for Ken and John from the 2025 AGM, which are included in Vanessa's Awards report. Vanessa's report is a long one, since it also highlights all our amazing prize winners, plus the best student presentations from the 2025 Conference. I had the great pleasure to present those awards at the Conference Dinner and, as always, thanks to our generous sponsor for the student prizes - Harmonic Analytics.

The NZSA's amazing Exec members continue to work hard, ensuring our regular activities are running smoothly and flourishing - as is our membership roll, which continues to grow. At the March 2026 Exec meeting, Membership Secretary Matt Parry reported that our membership total has now reached 588, which is fantastic! It remains an honour and a privilege to be the President of a growing association that has members of all ages, who individually and collectively achieve so much. This issue includes detailed reports on much of the Exec's mahi and our members' achievements. A big thank you to all newsletter contributors and our editor, David, plus the team of proofreaders.

A year ago I reported that the NZSA and the Statistical Society of Australia (SSA) had

agreed a new financial arrangement to support ongoing management and editorial activities for the Australian & New Zealand Journal of Statistics (ANZJS). More or less as this newsletter is published, the two associations are set to receive our first (definitely sizeable) royalties payment from Wiley, in accord with that new agreement. Woo hoo! A big thank you to the treasurers of both organisations, NZSA's Ciprian Giurcăneanu and SSA's Damjan Vukcevic. Also regarding the ANZJS, this month (April 2026) saw the publication of a special issue that celebrates the 25th anniversary of R, and which was edited by NZSA Exec member Tilman Davies. There's a separate feature about that special issue later in this newsletter - great job, Tilman!

A line of work that continues from 2025 is led by some members of our Education Committee, who continue to engage, and attempt to influence (via letters sent from me, as NZSA President), the updates currently being implemented and/or drafted within the School Curriculum. Within the last week we have commented on proposals for the new Year 13 subject, "Statistics & Data Science". Our comments were received with gratitude, and we have been invited to continue our engagement with the new work on the Phase 5 (Years 11-13) redevelopment. This contrasts somewhat markedly with the lack of engagement that the Ministry of Education allowed towards the end of 2025 with the hurriedly redesigned and implemented curriculum for Years 0-10. As Maxine Pfannkuch's Ed Comm report details (among many other topics, as always, from a very active committee), in March this year we submitted a detailed analysis of errors in the Statistics and Probability statements within the curriculum. We also included suggested corrections, and we hope that those corrections

will be incorporated into the curriculum ASAP.

The excellent mahi that our Students and Early Career Statisticians Network oversee has been boosted by the addition of a joint coordinator, James Bristow, who will help Muskaan with that expanding coordination role, and who has written the detailed SECS report within this issue. Welcome to the NZSA Executive Committee, James! Lisa Thomasen continues to lead the Mentoring team, which is also expanding (and now includes James Bristow too) - see Lisa's report for more details - and thanks to everyone for helping Lisa out with a whole range of worthwhile mentoring initiatives.

Ting Wang has been a member of the NZSA

Exec for several years now, but decided to step down at last year's AGM. So, on behalf of the whole association, many thanks, Ting, for your contributions over the years.

Finally, looking ahead to December 2026, some of our northern members are busy organising a couple of back-to-back meetings that will be held at the University of Auckland: the 2026 NZSA Conference, 14-16 Dec, contact Beatrix Jones, and the 40th Anniversary Symposium of the Japanese Society of Computational Statistics, 17-18 Dec, local contact Thomas Yee, fresh from winning the 2025 Littlejohn Research Award. Congratulations again, Thomas!

Best wishes, John

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# Editorial

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by DAVID HUIJSER



Kia ora koutou,

Welcome to Newsletter Issue 94!

This issue comes to you a little later than planned—so late, in fact, that it feels well past the point of wishing everyone a Happy New Year. Nevertheless, I hope you all enjoyed a good summer, ideally paired with a healthy dose of conferences. You can read reports from MaxEnt and NZSA later in this issue.

One thing that stood out during the conference season was how strongly the New Zealand statistical community was represented on the international stage. In late November, Jesse Goodman (University of Auckland) delivered a keynote at the Australasian Region Biometrics meeting. A few weeks later, Martin Hazelton (University of Otago) was a keynote speaker at the Australian Statistical Conference. Just before the summer break, at MaxEnt, Richard Arnold (Victoria University of Wellington) and Renate Meyer (University of Auckland) were invited speakers.

Beyond our presence at international conferences, the global influence of our community is also evident in this year's celebration of the 25th anniversary of R. The ANZJS has marked this milestone with a Special Issue, which is highlighted later in this newsletter. Another entry in the future events is also related to R: the Ihaka

Lecture Series.

Len Cook appeared in conversation with Ian Fraser in Wellington on 29 April to discuss his book *South Dunedin to Whitehall* at Unity Books, after the original 21 April event was postponed due to extreme weather conditions.

Stephen Haslett and George Seber have recently published an article on the New Zealand Census for *The Conversation*, which you can read [here](#).

All of this is a clear sign that our community is strong and thriving.

I am very grateful for the many contributions to this issue—once again a testament to the vitality of our statistical community. The

I would like to note that we no longer have a contributor from Foodstuffs, as Mazen Kassis has taken on an exciting new role at another organisation. We thank Mazen for his valuable contributions and wish him all the very best in this next chapter.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to our proofreaders for their careful work behind the scenes.

As always, please send any items for our next issue—planned for September 2026—to [newsletter@stats.org.nz](mailto:newsletter@stats.org.nz).

Hei konā mai,

David

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# Upcoming Conferences and Events

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## ANZJS Special Issue: 25 YearS

by TILMAN DAVIES



I'm delighted to announce a special issue of ANZJS celebrating 25 years since the first official release of R, which has just been published. It contains articles from names like Ross Ihaka, Hadley Wickham, Adrian Baddeley and several more of prominent standing in the R community.

While those with institutional subscriptions and NZSA members can read the articles as usual, Wiley tells me there is also presently a 90-day free-to-read period for everyone. So now is a great time to spread the word far and wide :).

The year 2025 marked a quarter-century since

the inaugural, official release of R: Version 1.0.0. As a language which has left an incalculable mark on all aspects of the field of statistics and beyond, there is no better time to reflect upon its stratospheric growth and impact by celebrating the breadth of what the language can do; how it has evolved; where it is applied; and where it will go from here. This special issue of the Statistical Computing section of the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Statistics (ANZJS) assembles contributions from researchers and developers who have helped shape the R landscape, celebrating a language whose most distinctive feature may be its capacity to keep evolving through the people who use it.

Please see the link below for more details.

[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1467-842X.25-years](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/toc/10.1111/(ISSN)1467-842X.25-years)

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## Australasian Applied Statistics Conference 2026

by VANESSA CAVE



The Australasian Applied Statistics Conference 2026 (AASC2026) will be held on the Sunshine Coast from the 30 November to the 4 December 2026.

AASC2026 is for anyone passionate about real-world data analysis, providing opportunities to exchange ideas in all areas of applied statistics, as well as encouraging networking

and collaboration. Whether you are a student, researcher, industry representative, or simply have a keen interest in anything related to statistics, AASC2026 will provide plenty of opportunities to learn, engage, share, and connect with fellow data science enthusiasts in a friendly setting.

More information is available on the conference website (<https://aasc2026.netlify.app/>).

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## Ihaka Lecture Series 2026

by PAUL MURRELL



The Ihaka Lecture Series was established in March 2017 by the Department of Statistics at the University of Auckland to honour Associate Professor Ross Ihaka for his pioneering contributions to statistical computing and data science.

Since its inception, this annual lecture series has provided a platform for leading thinkers to share insights into the evolving landscape of data analysis, computation, and statistical methodology. Over the years, it has explored the dynamic intersection of statistics and data science, covering themes such as data visualisation, software development, machine learning, and the application of data analysis to public policy and broader societal challenges—alongside an increasing emphasis on clear communication and the responsible use of data.

We are delighted to announce that the 2026

Ihaka Lecture Series will consist of 3 lectures with strong emphasis on data visualisation.

- Lecture 1 - 23 July Kieran Healy
- Lecture 2 - 30 July Nicola Rennie
- Lecture 3 - 6 August Rob Hyndman

Professor Kieran Healy is a professor of Sociology at Duke University, well known within the R community for his visualisations. Nicola Rennie is a data visualization specialist and enthusiast, with an academic background in mathematics and statistics. Rob Hyndman is at the Department of Econometrics and Business Statistics at Monash University and is known for his work on forecasting and time series.

While details regarding this year's theme are still forthcoming, we encourage you to stay tuned for updates. This promises to be an engaging and intellectually stimulating event, continuing the tradition of excellence that defines the series.

Mark your calendars and keep an eye out for further announcements!

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## 2026 NZSA Conference

by BEATRIX JONES



The Department of Statistics at the University of Auckland is delighted to host the 2026 NZSA Conference. The conference will take place from (roughly) midday Monday 14 to 5PM Wednesday 16 December 2026, with Wednesday afternoon being a workshop

offered jointly with the Japanese Society of Computational Statistics (TBC). Two keynote speakers have already been confirmed, **François-Xavier Briol** from University College London and **Alain Vandal** from the University of Auckland.

Keep an eye out for abstract and registration deadlines—coming soon!

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# The 40th Anniversary Symposium of Japanese Society of Computational Statistics

by THOMAS YEE



To mark its 40th anniversary, the Japanese Society of Computational Statistics will host a commemorative symposium, bringing together domestic and international researchers to share recent advances in computational statistics and promote global collaboration.

The timing of the symposium aligns with the NZSA Conference week, including a shared Wednesday, allowing attendees to benefit from both events.

Dates: December 17–18, 2026

Location: University of Auckland

## Keynote Speakers

- Thomas Lumley, PhD  
Professor and Chair in Biostatistics, Faculty of Science, University of Auckland  
(Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand, Fellow of the American Statistical Association, Member of the International Statistical Institute)
- Paul Murrell, PhD  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Science, University of Auckland  
(Fellow of the American Statistical Association)
- Simon Urbanek, PhD  
Associate Professor, Faculty of Science, University of Auckland



For more information, please visit:  
<https://jscs-sympo40anniv.ywstat.jp/>

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# Conference and Event Reports

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## 2025 NZSA Conference

by CONOR KRESIN



The 2025 NZSA Conference took place at the University of Otago from 8-10 December 2025. Over 100 delegates were present, and there were three parallel streams comprising more than 60 contributed talks. Invited speakers included Kerrie Mengersen (Queensland University of Technology),

Thomas Lumley (University of Auckland), and Darryl MacKenzie (Proteus). In addition, there were four special sessions: Women in Data Science (chaired by Ivy Liu), Biostatistics (chaired by Alice Kim), Pipeline Development with R (chaired by James Bristow), and Essential Skills for Statisticians (chaired by Lisa Thomasen).

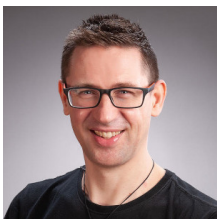
Finally, the conference featured a short talk about the state of statistics in New Zealand by the Honourable Dr Shane Reti (Minister for Pacific Peoples, Minister of Science, Innovation, and Technology, Minister of Universities and Minister of Statistics), which was followed up by a panel chaired by Conor Kresin discussing the disbanding of the NZ Census with panellists Len Cook, Thomas Lumley and Garry Dunnet.

Many thanks to all participants. Special thanks to Bethany Macdonald, Matthew Parry, Stephen Fortune, Carlo Gamble, John Haywood, and Harmonic Analytics for their generous financial support. The conference website (and book of abstracts therein) remains accessible at [this link](#).

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## MaxEnt 2025 Conference

by DAVID HUIJSER



The MaxEnt 2025 conference was held at the University of Auckland from 14–19 December 2025. The week began on Sunday with four workshops and a welcoming reception. The

workshop topics were:

- Foundations of Probability
- Positive Monte Carlo — A Nested Sampling Tutorial
- Simulation-Based Inference
- Bayesian Physics-Informed Neural Networks for Inverse Problems and Digital Twins for Industrial and Biological Applications

These high-quality workshops set the tone for

the week, prompting lively discussions (mostly on Transformers) — including the now-inevitable conclusion that the use of AI is rapidly increasing within both the Bayesian and Maximum Entropy communities.

Despite the fact that travelling to New Zealand the week before Christmas can be challenging for many international participants, attendance was strong. The programme featured over 40 presentations spanning a broad range of fields, including physics, astronomy, health, biology, and statistics. We were fortunate and proud to host four excellent local keynote speakers, whose topics were as diverse as the contributed presentations themselves.

- Monday: Alexei Drummond (UoA) discussed the intricacies of Bayesian Phylogenetics and Population Genetics: From Models to Cancer Genomics.
- Tuesday: Richard Arnold (VUW) presented on Bayesian Non-Parametric Models in Reliability.
- Wednesday: In a visually compelling talk, Renate Meyer spoke about Bayesian Nonparametric Methods for the Spectral Analysis of Gravitational Wave Data.
- Thursday: Geoff Nicholls shared his expertise in Bayesian Inference for Loss Hyperparameters in Generalised Bayesian Inference.

During the conference, I especially enjoyed chatting with founding members of the MaxEnt community, including John Skilling and Carlos Rodriguez, and was delighted to have the chance to speak with them. I also had the opportunity to speak with many of the students attending MaxEnt, and I was genuinely impressed by the strength and promise of the next generation of researchers in the community. As a committee, we were pleased to award three student prizes: two Best Presentation Awards (first prize and runner-up) and one light-hearted award — the NZ Fauna Creativity Student Award — for the

best incorporation of New Zealand fauna into a presentation. The only difficulty was the exceptionally high quality of the student talks, which made the selection process particularly challenging.

- The Best Presentation Award went to Vasudev Mittal for Confronting the Cosmological Principle (CP).
- The Runner-up Award went to Johanna Moser for Parameter Learning with Physics-Consistent Gaussian Processes.
- The NZ Fauna Creativity Award went to Mali Land-Strykowski, who cleverly incorporated kiwis into an animation illustrating the Ellis & Baldwin effect (the cosmic dipole) in his talk on Bayesian Tension Quantification of the Cosmic Dipole Anomaly.

As a member of the MaxEnt 2025 Organising Committee, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed to making the event such a success. In particular, I offer special thanks to my fellow committee members — Brendon Brewer, Kate Lee, Patricio Maturana Russel, Geraint F. Lewis, Robert Niven, Colin Fox, and especially Paige Chong — for their hard work and dedication. Thanks also to John Skilling for his generous donation, and to Entropy for their support of MaxEnt 2025.

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# Stories of Interest

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## NZSA Awards

by VANESSA CAVE, CONVENOR OF THE AWARDS COMMITTEE



### Honours and Awards

Four New Zealand statisticians were recognised with **NZSA awards** at the conference dinner in Dunedin. Thanks to everyone who submitted a nomination for the 2025 awards. Competition was exceptionally tight, with several nominations received for each of the Worsley, Littlejohn, Jean Thompson and Campbell Awards.

### Worsley Early Career Research Award

The **Worsley** award recognises outstanding recent published research from a New Zealand statistician in the early stages of their career.

**Recipient: Jason Wen (PHF Science and The University of Auckland)**

*Citation from James Curran*

Wen Zhijian (Jason) develops and applies novel machine learning and deep learning methods for the classification and interpretation of forensic evidence. His work allows the quantification of forensic evidential items, such as digital images, that have traditionally been regarded as unquantifiable or poorly treated as massively multivariate observations which ignores the underlying structure inherent in the data. Jason's work removes much of the variability and subjectivity attributable to humans in a field where such biases can have serious legal implications. The importance of his work cannot be understated. Jason received his PhD from the University of Auckland in Statistics in 2021. His PhD made novel contributions to the field of forensic statistics in two different fields of forensic science: firearms and glass. Both pieces of

work employed relatively modern developments in statistics and machine/deep learning. Jason's glass work used a Dirichlet process to develop a Bayesian non-parametric/infinite mixture model for forensic glass evidence. This approach allows us to refine our models for the interpretation of forensic glass evidence. Jason turned this part of his thesis into a journal article which was subsequently published in *Science & Justice*, which is the official journal of the prestigious United Kingdom Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences. Jason also developed a classification method using convolutional neural networks (CNNs), histograms of oriented gradients (HOGs), and support vector machines (SVMs) to distinguish between bullets fired from different rifles on the basis of images of the firing pin impressions left on cartridge cases. This is, I believe, one of the earliest applications of CNNs to forensic evidence. It, for the first time, allowed forensic scientists to consider image data in a statistical framework. This is a seriously important development with a vast array of potential applications. Images are used to record many types of evidential items including, but not restricted to, shoe prints, blood spatter patterns, tool marks, firearms marks (there are other markings left on the cartridge case and bullet/projectile that can be used to link them to the firearm used), and hand-writing. Traditionally, such evidence has been interpreted by expert human examiners who has been shown to be highly subjective, and highly variable. The introduction of deep learning techniques (of which CNNs are one part) is a massive leap forward in terms of firstly eliminating the human element and secondly providing results which are amenable to more impartial statistical treatments.

Jason published his work on firing pins in the *Journal of Forensic Sciences*—the official journal of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. He then went on to publish two further papers, one on shoeprints, and on automated detection of rulers in forensic images using his knowledge of CNNs and image segmentation techniques.



*Wen Zhijian (Jason) & John Haywood*

More recently, Jason helped me and our collaborator Courtney Lynch with what, in some sense, can be regarded a common statistical problem—the classification of an observation that has not been previously observed or for which the classifier has not been trained on. This problem arises for us in the classification of body fluids. The biological methods Jason and we work with are based on messenger RNA (mRNA) and have been developed to classify blood, menstrual blood, semen, saliva, and vaginal fluid. However, they cannot currently correctly identify nasal mucosa, rectal mucosa, or sweat, and mixtures of these fluids with the original five. Ideally, one would like a classifier to return a result of “unknown” when it encounters an observation it does not recognise. Statisticians do not really think much about this problem, but there has been some recent work in the machine learning world. Jason developed a novel method that can reliably classify out-of-training set observations

as “unknown” for our body fluid problem. This work was an integral part of our most recent publication (of which Jason is a joint author) in *Forensic Science International: Genetics*. FSI-Gen is the most prestigious forensic genetics journal in print.

### **Littlejohn Research Award**

The **Littlejohn** award recognises excellence in research, based on publications during the five calendar years preceding the date of the award.

**Recipient: Thomas Yee (The University of Auckland)**

*Citation from Chris Wild*

Early in his research career, Thomas developed a large umbrella-class of regression models that generalise generalised linear models and generalised additive models. He described this class as “Vector Generalized Linear and Additive Models” with the characteristic that any of the parameters of a base model can be replaced by linear or smooth regression functions of covariates. The class also includes his reduced-rank vector generalised linear models which provide for dimension reduction. Because the VGAM framework covers such a wide swathe of well-known statistical models, the many theoretical and methodological advances that Thomas makes are implemented in his R package VGAM for the full range of models to which they are appropriate. The most complete single account of the VGAM models, and the results of his research in the area at the time, is his 590-page magnum opus published by Springer in 2015. A second edition invited by Springer is well under way.

Thomas’s written research is impressive, but I think an even bigger contribution is his ongoing work on his open-source R package VGAM. This is where he first publishes most of his innovations to provide research communities with new, immediately-useable modelling and analysis capabilities. Having so many models linked within a single coherent family makes it enormously easier for researchers to move between models in search of something that better models their data. I’m also reminded that

Hadley Wickham's software is his most important set of research outputs and that Hadley won the 2019 COPSS Award, showing recognition of this form of publication at the highest level. In my view, VGAM is the most flexible statistical modelling system within in a single coherent modelling framework that there is. VGAM is in the top 2% of the 20,000 R packages on CRAN in terms of downloads. Between 2013 and 2018 alone there were approximately 700,000 downloads (data obtained for the 2018 PBRF round).



*Thomas Yee*

Thomas's work over the last 5 years continues his expansion of the VGAM class and work on overcoming important and well-known theoretical and practical problems in the fitting of statistical models and making statistical inferences, together with making all of the results available in his software, usually in advance of formal publication. The work is primarily in two areas: (i) likelihood inference and the problems with Wald-test based inferences known as the Hauck–Donner effect (HDE); and (ii) count regression via Generally Altered, Inflated, Truncated and Deflated (GAITD) regression, a super model that can accommodate under-, equi- and over-dispersion relative to the Poisson using a negative binomial (NB) parent, and the GT–Expansion (GTE) method.

### **Jean Thompson Award**

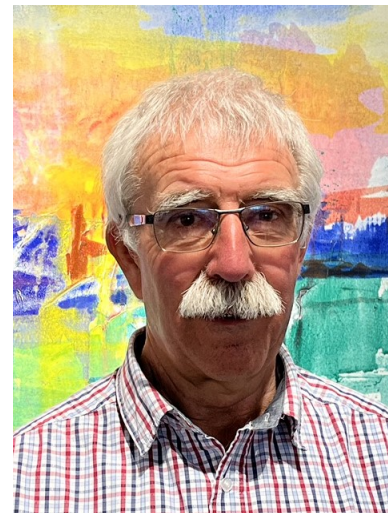
The **Jean Thompson** award celebrates statistical excellence by practitioners in New Zealand

industry. It recognises outstanding levels of impact in the application of existing or new statistical methods to New Zealand industry, and the exemplification of good statistical practice.

**Recipient: Harold Henderson (AgResearch Ltd)**

*Citation from Neil Cox and Ken Dodds*

Harold Henderson has made an enormous contribution to the application of statistical methods in New Zealand industries. Harold has been a statistician with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) and continuing with the formation of AgResearch. Harold started work with MAF in Wellington in 1974 before getting an NRAC Fellowship and going to Cornell for his doctoral studies with Shayle Searle, returning to MAF at Ruakura in 1979. Harold has collaborated in a wide range of projects including animal physiology and endocrinology, livestock production including dairy foods, molecular biology, pastures and crops, animal health, animal reproduction, animal behaviour, human health and nutrition, and environmental science. Much of this work has resulted in his 77 refereed papers, published between 1977 and 2024.



*Harold Henderson*

Harold has a wide-ranging set of interests including the use of matrix algebra in statistics, unbalanced data, generalised linear models, regression analysis, and curve fitting. In 1997 he received a Prince & Princess of Wales Science Award to visit Cornell to pursue interests in exploratory data analysis, statistics packages and

the graphical display of data. He returned with a particular interest in dynamic graphics and adopted the early use of such software including the DataDesk package.

Harold has been a vital part of the Ruakura team over the years, being a highly valued and sought-after collaborator on research projects, a respected mentor to others in the team and particularly to new graduates starting work or on work experience. One of Harold's strongest contributions to statistics in New Zealand has been through encouraging, mentoring and connecting statisticians. Harold has served on NZSA committees in various roles over a long period including president (1993-1995), newsletter co-editor (1989-1993), awards committee (2004-present), membership secretary (1989-2023), retiring from the exec committee in 2023 but still supporting the association informally such as with email communications. He was awarded Life Membership of the NZSA in 2013. He has also been heavily involved in organizing national and international conferences. These include the joint International Biometric and NZSA conference at the University of Waikato in 1992 where there were 461 delegates representing 36 countries. In 2001 he was part of a team that organized the Australasian Biometrics and NZSA Joint Conference in Christchurch. At these and many other events he has been the unofficial photographer and has shared these photographs with the statistics community. Even though he began phased retirement in 2018, Harold continues to have regular contact with colleagues, continuing to do some unpaid work on research projects, giving advice and assistance to younger members of staff, and attending the Ruakura statisticians' Tuesday morning teas.

### **Campbell Award**

The **Campbell Award** celebrates a sustained contribution to the promotion and development of statistics within New Zealand.

### **Recipient: Claire Cameron (The University of Otago)**

*Citation from Andrew Gray*

Research Associate Professor Claire Cameron is an outstanding and highly productive researcher, as demonstrated by her more than 100 publications. Many have been published in high-impact journals, including prestigious outlets such as *The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, and many have been heavily cited, with some cited over 100 times. Her research excellence is also demonstrated by her success in obtaining external research funding, including several large grants from the Health Research Council. Her publications include a dozen statistics primers for the *New Zealand Medical Student Journal*, and she has also been involved in many other activities promoting effective use of statistics, particularly in health research.



*Claire Cameron*

Claire is also an outstanding leader. She provided leadership for two years to the biostatistics group at the University of Otago prior to the formation of the Biostatistics Centre in 2017. She then provided substantial support to the incoming Director during the Centre's establishment. Claire is now Director of the Centre, a role in which she has flourished and continues to provide mentorship and leadership to many.

Alongside her extensive leadership, research, and service roles, Claire has made exceptional contributions to building a community of biostatisticians in Aotearoa New Zealand. These contributions are sometimes single-handed and often collaborative. Highlights include: the Box Plot network, established in 2013; regular meetings of biostatisticians and associated

academics on the Dunedin campus, followed by the establishment of a cross-campus group at the University of Otago; the NZ Biostatistics Symposium (2021); the NZ Biostatistics Conference (2023); the inaugural biostatistics session at the NZSA 2025 Conference; the NZSA's mentoring programme since its inception; and her role as the New Zealand representative on the US-based Caucus of Women in Statistics and Data Science since 2020. Claire has worked tirelessly alongside a diverse range of colleagues and collaborators with the goal of strengthening biostatistics and statistics as disciplines and as careers for future generations.

Claire's sustained advocacy for biostatisticians and biostatistics as a discipline and her leadership in building strong communities make her a truly deserving recipient of the Campbell Award. On behalf of all those in the communities she has helped create and strengthen, and especially on behalf of the Biostatistics Centre and associates, congratulations, Claire, on this well-deserved achievement, and thank you for all that you do.

### Harmonic Analytics Student Presentation Prize

Congratulations to all 25 students who presented at our 2025 conference in Dunedin. The

prizes for the top student presentations were generously sponsored by **Harmonic Analytics**, a long-time supporter of students and early-career statisticians.

The 2025 conference winners are:

### Best Student Presentation – first equal

- Sarah Croft (University of Otago) – Estimating abundance in small populations using pedigree reconstruction
- Tarin Eccleston (The University of Auckland) – Rapid Bayesian Inference of Supernovae Gravitational Waves

### Highly Commended Student Presentations

- Alec van Helsdingen (The University of Auckland) – Modelling Under-Dispersed but Clustered Whale Cues
- Ruiting Mao (The University of Auckland) – Rapid Gravitational Wave Parameter Estimation on LISA Signals with Gaps using Flow Matching
- Siwei Zhai (The University of Auckland) – Childhood Risk and Resilience Factors for Pasifika Youth Respiratory Health: Accounting for Attrition and Missingness



2025 best student presentation winners (from left to right): Sarah Croft, Tarin Eccleston, Lisa Chen (Harmonic Analytics), John Haywood (NZSA President), Siwei Zhai, Ruiting Mao and Alec van Helsdingen.

Many thanks to the anonymous panel of judges!

## New Life Members

Congratulations to John Harraway from The University of Otago, and Ken Dodds from AgResearch, on being elected honorary life members at the 2025 AGM. This prestigious title celebrates NZSA members with a long and distinguished record of service to the Association.

*Citations by John Haywood*

**John Harraway** is a lecturing legend, with 54 years of teaching statistics in the University of Otago's Mathematics and Statistics department. He is also a life member of Selwyn College, where he was a senior resident and acting warden. Past university students of John's include Len Cook, well known to many in NZSA, who went on to be Government Statistician of New Zealand and National Statistician and Director of the UK Office for National Statistics.

John's passion for teaching statistics led to his appointment as President of the International Association for Statistical Education and to his election as a member of the International Statistical Institute. John continues to advocate strongly for the appropriate use of statistical methodologies, with his 20 "statistics in research" motivational videos and three apps for Official Statistics training being used in countries throughout the world, as part of statistical outreach coordinated by the International Statistical Literacy Project.



*John Harraway and John Haywood*

The New Zealand Statistical Association (NZSA) honoured John in 2013 with our Campbell Award, to celebrate his prolonged and outstanding contributions to Statistical Education. Today it gives me great pleasure to further the acknowledgement of John's tremendous contributions by putting him forward as a Life Member of NZSA. [9 December 2025]

**Ken Dodds** completed an Honours degree in statistics at the University of Otago in 1981, followed by a PhD in statistical genetics in 1986, supervised by Bruce Weir at North Carolina State University. Since then Ken has worked for AgResearch, which is now part of the Bioeconomy Science Institute.

At AgResearch Ken has not only provided statistical design and analysis for animal genetics and reproduction, but also driven a number of key developments in analytical methodology that have had a major impact on New Zealand industry. He also has been instrumental in the adoption and implementation of a variety of new analytical procedures that have had a significant impact on research output by others. These include linkage and linkage disequilibrium mapping, and genome wide association studies, which have been instrumental in identifying a number of major genes of commercial impact to New Zealand. Perhaps most importantly has been Ken's adaption, extension, and development of the statistics of parentage assignment, and mixed model analysis for the estimation of breeding values. Many species have benefited from his work but especially the New Zealand sheep, deer, salmon, and forage industries.

Ken has been involved in a wide variety of collaborations in both New Zealand and overseas and with a diverse group of researchers. Perhaps under-recognised has been his contribution to many summer interns, masters, and PhD students over a long period of time. More recently he has taken a more active role as a formal supervisor of several statistical PhD students. Google scholar tells me Ken has over 14,000 citations, with an h-index of 53 and an i10-index of 174.

In 2022 Ken was awarded the Jones Medal by the Royal Society Te Apārangi. The Jones Medal

recognises a lifetime achievement in pure or applied mathematics or statistics, and was given to Ken for his work developing and applying statistical methods for genetic data analysis that enable the use of low-cost genotyping in primary industries and ecology. Ken was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society Te Apārangi in 2024.



*Ken Dodds and John Haywood*

Today it gives me great pleasure to add recognition from the New Zealand Statistical Association (NZSA) of Ken's sustained contributions to statistical genetics and its commercial application within New Zealand industries. I propose that we honour Ken as a Life Member of NZSA. [9 December 2025]

## Travel Awards

### Student Travel Awards

Travel grants were awarded to 17 students to support their attendance at the 2025 NZSA conference. The recipients included 13 students from Auckland and two each from Victoria and Massey. Congratulations to all recipients on their awards!

### Early Career Discretionary Travel Fund

Congratulations to early-career members Oliver Stevenson, Laia Egea Cortes, and Peter Green on receiving funding to support their attendance at the 2025 NZSA conference.

## Tidy International Travel Scholarship

The inaugural recipient of the NZSA Tidy International Travel Scholarship, generously sponsored by Hadley Wickham, was Sarah Croft, a PhD student at the University of Otago. Sarah used the scholarship to attend the IBS-AR Conference in Canberra.

Thank you to Muskaan and the SECSs Awards Committee for designing and running this process.

Applications closed on 19 April. Please check the Student and Early Career Statistician section of this newsletter for more details on page 20.

## Call for Applications – Campbell Bequest Fund

### Funding Details:

- Amount Available Annually: Approximately \$ 1,500
- Application Deadlines: Applications are received twice a year, in April and October.
- Application Submission: Applications should be emailed to the Convenor of the Awards Committee:  
[vanessa.cave@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:vanessa.cave@auckland.ac.nz)

**About the Fund:** The Campbell Bequest Fund supports initiatives that reflect the interests of Professor Campbell. These include:

- the importance of a good mathematical foundation for any teaching of statistics;
- the likelihood of developments in mathematics being stimulated by the needs of the social sciences, and the role that women, in particular, will play in this;
- more generally the need to help women mathematicians;
- the responsibility he felt towards 'second-tier' students – the 'elite' ones were seen as 'self-propelling';
- effective connections between schools and universities;
- the importance of instilling intellectual honesty – much wider than just mathematics.

For more information, visit

<https://www.stats.org.nz/campbell-bequest-fund/>

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# Updates

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## NZSA Mentoring Program

by LISA THOMASEN



### Mentoring Update

Throughout the month of March, this year's mentoring pairs were matched and introduced. There are 21 mentors and 23 mentees involved this year. This includes one person who is both a mentor and a mentee, and a mentoring group consisting of one mentor and two mentees. We have 5 mentors and 20 mentees who are involved in the program for the first time this year. Pairs will connect over a six-month period from April to September.

### Coffee Roulette

The purpose of coffee roulette is to provide networking opportunities for NZSA members. It is ideal for individuals who are interested in mentoring with the primary goal of expanding their network and individuals looking for opportunities to connect and learn from others without the structure and time commitment of a mentoring pair. Participants are randomly matched with a fellow coffee roulette participant and then connect virtually or in-person for an informal discussion. There are 35 participants involved in coffee roulette this year, with the first match being sent out in March and subsequent matches being emailed in the first week of each month. Coffee roulette is open to all NZSA members and matches can be started or paused at any point throughout the year. If you'd like to receive a coffee roulette match next month, email [Siobhan.Hopkins@stats.govt.nz](mailto:Siobhan.Hopkins@stats.govt.nz) to get yourself on the list.

### Lunch 'n' Learns

NZSA members are invited to join the SSA & NZSA Mentoring Program Professional Skills Webinar Series consisting of 4 sessions from April – July. Discounted registration is available for NZSA members with free registration available for mentors and mentees in both programs.

- Webinar 1: Thursday 23rd April 2026 2pm NZT.  
Building a team, one person at a time – A/Prof David Price, Doherty Institute
- Webinar 2: Thursday 7th May 2026 1pm NZT.  
Effective networking as a statistician – Prof Kelley M Kidwell, University of Michigan
- Webinar 3: Thursday 18th June 2026 2pm NZT.  
Robust reproducible research – Dr Simon Tuke, University of Adelaide
- Webinar 4: Thursday 30th July 2026 2pm NZT.  
Unlock your Mentoring Potential – Lisa Thomassen, Fonterra, New Zealand

Other Lunch 'n' Learns will be offered throughout year and will be promoted via the NZSA mailing list. You can suggest topics or volunteer to facilitate a session by emailing [manori.wickramasinghe@stats.govt.nz](mailto:manori.wickramasinghe@stats.govt.nz).

### Lean in Circle

Thanks to those who have expressed interest in joining this year's lean in circle. I'll be in touch with participants to share more details and to confirm the time for the first session soon.

## Introducing the mentoring program team

This year I have 4 enthusiastic team members who are helping run the mentoring program behind the scenes.

### Lillian Lee

Lillian Lee is based in Christchurch and recently completed a Master of Applied Data Science at the University of Canterbury. She enjoys exploring how data and AI can be applied to real-world problems. Lillian has been supporting the email admin throughout this year's matching process and will be leading the mentee meet & greet sessions.



*Lillian Lee*

### Manori Wickramasinghe

Manori Wickramasinghe spent over 15 years in academia before transitioning to industry as a Data Analyst. Her current work at Stats NZ focuses on methodological support for data integration and household surveys. Manori co-ordinates topics and presenters for the lunch 'n' learns.



*Manori Wickramasinghe*

### James Bristow

James is currently pursuing a PhD in statistical epidemiology at Massey University, while working as a data scientist at the Bioeconomy Science Institute. He is also the co-chair of the NZSA Student and Early Career Statisticians Network, and is passionate about Bayesian modelling, spatiotemporal statistics, and the analysis of climate projection data. James will be supporting this year's Lunch 'n' Learn series, including hosting the Zoom calls.



*James Bristow*

### Siobhan Hopkins

Siobhan is based in Wellington and has recently completed a Master of Data Science at the University of Otago. She currently works as a Data Analyst at Stats NZ in the Methods & Design branch. This year she has taken on the role of Coffee Roulette Co-ordinator which involves sending out the monthly matches to all of our coffee roulette participants.

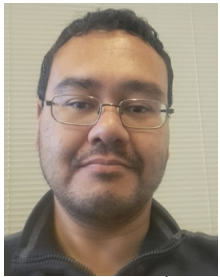


*Siobhan Hopkins*

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# Student and Early Career Statisticians' Network

by JAMES BRISTOW



## Changes in Representation

### Farewell to Jinxian Hu and Amy Li

We say goodbye to Jinxian Hu and Amy Li, who have stepped down as network representatives after serving on the committee for a year. During their time as representatives for Early Career Statisticians, Jinxian Hu served as a member of SECS Award Committee to help with the first round of the NZSA Tidy International Travel Scholarship and Amy Li helped the network as a Social Media manager. A round of applause to Jinxian and Amy for their amazing contributions.

## New Roles and People

A big thank you to James Bristow for stepping up this year to co-lead the network alongside Muskaan, bringing fresh energy and ideas. We also congratulate Yongshi Deng, who will represent the SECS network on the NZSA External Engagement Committee this year. Finally, a warm welcome to Sanduni Malluwawadu, who joins the team as our new SECS Social Media Manager.

## NZSA Tidy International Travel Scholarship – First Round Complete!

We're thrilled to inform you that the first round of the NZSA Tidy International Travel Scholarship was a success. The SECS Awards Committee designed the application process and evaluation criteria, which was approved by our generous sponsor Hadley Wickham.

The scholarship recipient Sarah Croft attended the IBS-AR Conference: Biometrics in the Bush Capital, held 24–28 November 2025 in Canberra, Australia. Her report from the conference is:

“With the help of the Tidy International travel scholarship, I was able to attend the International Biometric Society Australasian region conference in Canberra this past November. This was my

first international conference I have attended during my PhD and the exposure to other researchers within the biometrics field was incredibly valuable.

The keynote addresses were all very interesting. In particular, Cheng Soon Ong talked about designing “good” experiments and I really enjoyed the different data visualisation techniques shown within his presentation. One technique is Vizumap which is an R package which allows for visualisation of spatial data using a heat map blending to show both the estimate and uncertainty associated with a spatial region. Another highlight was Mevin Hooten’s keynote describing his recursive Bayesian method where if given a partition of the data, the posterior can be factored with respect to the partitions then the model can be fitted to partitions of the data sequentially. Model fitting and efficient algorithms are a large component of my project. I have read about these sequential MCMC and Bayesian methods, and listening to the talk as well as talking to Mevin afterwards provided ideas of how these methods may be used within my own work.

Some other talks that I really enjoyed were Sam Mason who is studying climate change response in plants in the Australian Alpine region and Michael Stewart who presented on mixture detection applied to ion channel openings using continuous time Markov Chains. Scott Foster’s work on Koala distributions was also really interesting, especially regarding the push pull with advocacy groups when the estimated population sizes differ from previous estimates.

I gained a lot of experience by attending the conference from the talks but some of the highlights were talking to other attendees at lunches and the dinner. We talked about science and statistics but also learning about other Universities and Institutes was a great opportunity to network and understand the global

environment, as someone starting out in my career.

The scholarship was incredibly generous and covered almost all of the cost to attend the conference as well as a pre-conference workshop. I also gained a lot of experience presenting my own work at the conference. The questions from the audience were incredibly helpful both in terms of feedback on the project itself and to help shape changes in my presentation I gave at the following NZSA Conference to communicate my work more effectively. Thank you very much to the NZSA for awarding me the scholarship!”

**NZSA Tidy International Travel Scholarship – Second Round!** This year, we are again ready with the second round of the NZSA Tidy International Travel Scholarship. The NZSA Tidy International Travel scholarship aims to support Students and Early Career Statisticians to attend international conferences related to statistics and/or data science.

- Application closed on 19 April
- Notification: On or before 31 May

The panel will review and assess applications based on the eligibility criteria and their answers to the questions in the application form. All applications that pass this review process will be placed in a qualified candidate pool. From this pool, the final scholarship recipient will be chosen through a random selection process. The scholarship will be awarded in the form of a travel reimbursement of NZD \$2,500, which can be used for conferences held up until June 2027. As part of the scholarship conditions, the recipient is required to attend specific sessions if requested and include summaries in the

post-conference report. Additionally, we welcome your feedback on the scholarship process. Email us at [secs@stats.org.nz](mailto:secs@stats.org.nz).

## **SECS Webinars 2025**

**Career Progression** - The session focused on navigating the transition from academia to industry, featuring insights from three inspiring early-career professionals: Olivia Angelin-Bonnet, Tom Moore, Hana Liang.

**Crafting Your Data Science Journey: Skills for Industry Success** - Our speaker, Dr Anjali Gupta, shared her insights on what it takes to thrive in data science and statistics roles in industry, what skills are currently in demand, and how students and early-career professionals can better prepare for success.

**Navigating the recruitment process** - Our speaker, Tim Cooke, shared some insights on the current job market and the recruitment process, tips on CVs and cover letters, preparation for the interview and avoiding common pitfalls in data science and statistics roles in industry, what skills are currently in demand, how AI is increasingly shaping recruitment, and what can help you stand out.

Missed these? The sessions are available on our [new YouTube channel](#) for you to watch anytime.

## **Stay Connected**

We're working on more exciting webinars and opportunities. If you'd like to present or suggest a topic, reach out to us! Follow the SECS network on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) to stay up to date.

Let's keep growing together!

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# Statistics Education

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## Statistics Education Research

by MAXINE PFANNKUCH



### The School Curriculum

The mathematics and statistics curriculum for Years 0-13 has gone through a major upheaval. In October 2025, a new version of the 2024 Years 0-10 curriculum appeared unexpectedly and was to be implemented in 2026 (a copy of this document is [here](#), and also available [online](#)). The Years 11-13 curriculum, which was released for consultation in early 2025 and for which we gave detailed feedback, was withdrawn. A new person was appointed to lead the rewrite in December 2025, with new people appointed to write the curriculum in January 2026, with the writing to be completed by the end of March 2026. We await the outcomes of the new curricula for Year 11, 12, and 13 Mathematics; Year 12 and 13 Applied Mathematics; Year 13 Statistics and Data Science; and Year 13 Further Mathematics. We also await announcements about new national assessments for Years 11 to 13.

The NZSA Education Committee was concerned about numerous incorrect statistical and probabilistic statements in the 2026 Years 0-10 curriculum. A detailed analysis of the errors was prepared, which was reviewed and endorsed by a number of university statisticians. In March 2026, the President of the NZSA, John Haywood, sent the submission to the Minister of Education, other Ministry people, and NZ Mathematics Association presidents to alert them to these errors and to offer our help in correcting them in the Years 0-10 curriculum and also in averting them in the Years 11-13 curricula.

### Probability | Tūponotanga - A Guide for Teaching Probability

The NZSA education committee's digital book, a guide for teachers to support the teaching and learning of tūponotanga | probability in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, is underway. Pip Arnold is leading the project. The book will have 14 wāhanga (chapters) authored by members of the NZSA education committee, other NZ educators, and international experts. The book's aim was to align with the new refreshed mathematics and statistics curriculum. **Three wāhanga** have been published, and a further six wāhanga have been submitted. The book is sponsored by NZSA and NZAMT.

### People in Statistics Education

Congratulations to Dave Phillipps on his appointment as President of the NZ Association of Mathematics Teachers (NZAMT). Dave is Head of the Mathematics and Statistics Learning Area at Lincoln High School, Christchurch. He is also a part-time lecturer in Post Grad Senior Secondary Mathematics and Statistics Education at the University of Canterbury. In his 36 years working in education, Dave has had 24 years as a Head of Department, 5 years as a curriculum advisor, and has filled various extra contracts in curriculum and assessment. Dave is a long-time member of the NZSA education committee and we are very fortunate that he has taken up this important position.



*Dave Phillipps*

Congratulations to Pip Arnold, the University of Auckland, who was invited to give a talk at a prestigious Workshop on International Practices in K-12 Mathematics Education: The Role of Computational Thinking, Data Science, and AI in February 2026 at the National Academies in Washington DC to discuss how top-performing countries in secondary mathematics education are modernizing their mathematics curricula. The invited international participants discussed processes, mechanisms, and best practices for revising secondary mathematics curricula and identifying the necessary competencies to remain globally competitive. Anna Fergusson, the University of Auckland, was also invited to this conference.



*Pip Arnold*

New Zealand’s involvement at this workshop is a testament to the high international regard for our statistics education research and past school statistics curricula.

Through the New Zealand-German academic mobility programme – the Programme for Project-Related Personal Exchange (PPP) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) – Anna Fergusson, the University of Auckland, is leading, in conjunction with Professor Rolf Biehler, University of Paderborn, a two-year collaborative high school data science project, “Branching out data science at the high school level: Exploring new pedagogical perspectives on data and modelling at the interface of statistics and computer science education”. As part of that project, Luca Jotzo, Sven Hüsing, and Yannik Fleischer (in photo below) from the University of Paderborn, Germany, visited the University of Auckland.



*Luca Jotzo, Sven Hüsing, and Yannik Fleischer*

The University of Paderborn, through its Project Data Science and Big Data in Schools (ProDaBi), is leading the world in creating a school data science and statistics curriculum. The

ProDaBi team are developing, implementing, and evaluating how data science, big data, and artificial intelligence can be taught in schools. Since 2018, the project has been developing and researching curricula for Years 5-13 and related teacher training courses. Anna, Malia Puloka, Stephanie Budgett, the University of Auckland, and Michelle Dalrymple, Cashmere High School, have visited Paderborn as part of the exchange programme.

### **Statistics and Data Science Education Conferences and International Involvement**

The ICOTS-12 conference is in Brisbane in July 2026, for which Stephanie Budgett, the University of Auckland, is the IPC Chair. At an IASE (International Association for Statistical Education) webinar panel on assessment in January 2026, Stephanie gave a report on her innovative oral assessment approach for her first year undergraduate students, a report she was also invited to give with colleague Lelia Boyle in webinars to people in the UK and Australia as well as at the University of Auckland. Anne Patel, the University of Auckland, was invited to be part of an IASE webinar in November 2025, which showcased three research papers published in the Statistics Education Research Journal in 2025. Pip Arnold continues to be the IASE Webinar coordinator. In 2025, Pip stepped down as Vice President of the IASE Executive, a position that Anna Fergusson was elected for 2025-2027, thus continuing New Zealand's long history of involvement in IASE.

### **Statistics Teachers' Day**

The Department of Statistics, University of Auckland, and the Auckland Mathematics Association organised and ran a successful **Statistics Teachers Day** in December 2025 under the direction of Anne Patel alongside Anna Fergusson. Dave Phillipps, Lincoln High School,

gave a well-received keynote talk, **Probably, Possibly, Potentially – Refocusing our lens to block out some of the Noise!** about how mathematics and statistics teachers are battling a lot of “noise” – curriculum changes, MoE messages, media hype, PPTA union action, the changing nature of students – and the question is how to manage the noise in education to refocus on getting the best for students. Anne Patel, Anna Fergusson, Pip Arnold, Camilo Lopez, the University of Auckland, Jessie Payne and Morgan Phillips, Stats NZ, Rachel Cunliffe, CensusAtSchool Director, and NZSA education committee member Marina McFarland, Auckland Girls' Grammar School, presented workshops. Over 200 teachers from across NZ attended the day.

### **CensusAtSchool Project**

The **CensusAtSchool project**, under the co-direction of Rachel Cunliffe and Anne Patel, launched its twelfth biennial online census for Years 3-13 students on February 25, 2025. So far about 25,000 students from 400 schools have participated. Monthly meetings with stakeholders from the Ministry of Education, Stats NZ and the University of Auckland are now occurring to stay up-to-date with new initiatives and to share information pertaining to statistics education and CensusAtSchool. Pip Arnold is the resource developer.

### **International Members of NZSA Education Committee**

In 2025, we welcomed new international members to the NZSA Education Committee: Anna Bargagliotti, USA, representing ASA; Ayse Bilgin, Australia, representing SSA, and Chris Brignell, UK, representing RSS. This international collaboration is very useful to keep up-to-date with new initiatives in these countries, such as the **Data and Computing in K12 Education: Foundational Competencies (2026) National Academies report**.

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# Local News

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## Biostatistics Centre at the Dunedin Campus, University of Otago

by ANDREW GRAY



The big event since the last newsletter was, of course, the NZSA Conference, held on the Dunedin campus and a mere ten-minute walk from our building. This was a fantastic opportunity to reconnect with colleagues, some of whom we mostly see through screens, and to meet others from across Aotearoa New Zealand for the first time.

As well as thought-provoking presentations and panels—and the best conference food I’ve had in a very long time—the highlight for us was Associate Professor Claire Cameron being announced as the well-deserved winner of the Campbell Award. We are all delighted with this recognition of Claire’s longstanding commitment to biostatistics as an academic discipline and career—something she sustains alongside her many impactful publications, awarded grants, and students supervised. I am reminded of Dr Ella Iosua once saying that biostatistics is the best career that she’d never heard of. You might have seen Claire in the Otago Daily Times or on social media recently, and such visibility helps young researchers become more aware of biostatistics as an academic specialty.

As far as I can tell, the biostatistics session at the conference was a first. A highlight there was Emeritus Professor Peter Herbison compressing 50 years in biostatistics into 20 minutes of reflections—a level of efficiency I can only dream of. I also really enjoyed Dr Priya Parmar’s two talks on her innovations and experiences in teaching biostatistics, another important step towards strengthening the future of biostatistics in Aotearoa. There were many other great presentations over the three days, including one

by our own Dr Nisa Widyastuti, and several of us were invited panel members.

A couple of months before the NZSA Conference, 14 October was the International Day of Women in Statistics and Data Science, marked by a 24-hour conference with the theme “Thriving in Your Environment”. I greatly enjoyed watching the panel featuring Claire, Lisa Thomasen, Dr Alice Kim, and Professor Robin Turner on “Thriving in Statistics in New Zealand”. The presentations are now available on YouTube if you’d like to catch up on this event. Since then, Nisa and Associate Professor Ari Samaranayaka have joined Claire and me as part of the NZSA mentoring programme created by Lisa, building on those themes of thriving and mutual support.

The Centre was extremely well represented at the State of Public Health Seminar 2025 Global Health Under Fire: Can Aotearoa Lead the Charge?, where Professor Sir Collin Tukuitonga made provocative and astute observations about our responsibilities and opportunities as health researchers.

Robin delivered her always-popular two-day workshop on introductory biostatistics for health researchers at the Wellington Public Health Summer School, following our usual November workshop programme.

Since the last newsletter, we’ve celebrated six birthdays: Robin, Ella, the Centre itself (which turned eight on 20 November), Ari, Claire, and myself (though the calendar insists my next birthday is still two years away).

We are always keen to get together, often over coffee or food, so if you are ever in Dunedin, please do get in touch with one of us.

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## Department of Statistics, University of Auckland

by PRIYA PARMAR



Mānawa Mai Open Day (held Saturday August 30<sup>th</sup>) was well represented by the Department, led by Azam Asanjarani along with Lisa Chen, Charlotte Jones-Todd, Kate Lee, Thomas Lumley (providing the expert speech), David Smith (the core organizer), Thomas Yee, Mohana Vijayan, Ping Huang, Guoping Hu, Mica (Ruiting) Mao, and Rena Weatherall.

Last September's Spring graduation featured 86 statistics/data science graduates; congratulations to our five PhD grads; Godrick Maradona Oketch, Rachel Passmore (supervised by Maxine Pfannkuch and Stephanie Budget), Chuyao Xu, Jason Peter Cairns, Zehua Zang.

The number of Master of Data Science students graduating continues to grow, with 29 in the last graduation, the largest postgraduate qualification, with another 29 graduating with BSc or BSc conjoint (9). Last November Brad Drayton successfully defended his thesis titled "Mixed-effects proportional hazards models for correlated complex samples", and he also wrote the R package [svycoxme](#). We look forward to congratulating Brad at the next graduation ceremony.

Renate Meyer, along with Richard Easter from Physics, have had their Marsden Council Grant renewed for another three years. These are the biggest research grants that Marsden gives out and there are only two of them. It's really a testament to Renate, Richard and the rest of the team that this has been renewed. Matt Edwards has been awarded a Marsden Fast Start Grant, which is also a big win, both for Matt and for the Department. Liza Bolton and Azam Asanjarani have both been awarded Faculty Teaching Development Grants. This is on top of Liza's recent Faculty of Science Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Award for her efforts in making teaching elements more accessible both here and

with our transnational education programme – double whammy!

Avinesh Pillai was awarded a University of Auckland Research Impact Award at the recent UoA Research Award. Leading from the front, Department Head, James Curran with Courtney Lynch, were awarded a Faculty FRDF Research Fellow Award alongside the Best Paper Award from ANZPAA-NIFS. Departmental teaching award recipients were Emma Lehrke for sustained excellence and leadership for STATS10X and Priya Parmar for teaching innovation in the postgraduate longitudinal data analysis paper.

Kate Lee – seminar organiser extraordinaire – has kept the Departmental visitor guest speaker list full with Michael J. Kane from MD Anderson Cancer Center, The University of Texas, speaking about "Modeling Population-Scale Commuting Patterns in New Zealand", Pernille Christensen on "The health data paradox - simultaneously simple and complex", Osamu Komori from Japan's Seikei University on "Cumulant-based approximation for fast and efficient prediction for species distribution", Stephanie Casey from Eastern Michigan University spoke on reflections of her journey as a statistics teacher and educator, Matt Beckman from The Pennsylvania State University evaluated "NLP tools designed to assist instructors with formative assessment for large-enrollment STEM classes", Mike West of Duke University spoke about "Betting on Better Models", Alberto Roverato (University of Padova) gave their presentation on "A unified approach to penalized likelihood covariance estimation in high dimensions". Matteo Ventura (University of Brescia) gave a talk on "Finite Mixtures of CUB Models for the Analysis of Consumer Perceptions on Sustainable Made in Italy", Javier Cano (Universidad Rey Juan Carlos) spoke about "Understanding Risk Factors in Young-Onset Dementia: A Bayesian Approach for Small Populations". Duncan Clark from Williams

College kicked off 2026 seminars with “A flexible model for dynamic networks of stochastic size”, University of Washington’s Carl Bergstrom kept us on the edge of our seats with “Modern day oracles or bulls\*\*t machines: How to thrive in a ChatGPT world”. We experienced a slight deviation from academic presenters with Dennis Christensen of the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment talking about “Adaptive designs and applications of TabPFN in statistics and AI”.

Local presenters included NZSA star Tilman Davies from University of Otago with a catchy talk on “Muscle CARs: Conditional Auto-regressions for Muscle Fibre-Type Data”, Jason Kurz came up from University of Waikato to speak about

“Radial Basis Operator Networks” and James Stanley (University of Otago) closed out the Departmental seminar year with a biostatistical talk on “Measures for adjusting for morbidity load for use with large administrative health datasets” – quite fitting given the NZSA Campbell Award winner for 2025 was a fellow University of Otago biostatistician (albeit different campus) – congratulations once again to Claire Cameron!

The Seminar page with abstracts is [here](#).

The Department was hugely supportive of affiliate Professor Barry Milne giving his inaugural lecture “Explorations in data: Developing a social research career through serendipity and curiosity” – absolutely fantastic!

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## Statistics Research Associates

by ROBERT DAVIES



Congratulations to Ting Wang on being appointed a full professor at Otago University. Ting’s PhD was funded from a Marsden Grant awarded to SRA. Her principal supervisor was Mark Bebbington of Massey and her co-supervisors were David Vere-Jones and David Harte of SRA. So we think of her as part of the

family.

David Harte has been visiting Prof Jiancang Zhuang at the Institute of Statistical Mathematics in Tokyo, just slightly early for the Cherry Blossom season (see picture).

Otherwise everyone is just continuing doing the same stuff as before and getting older.



*Cherry blossom (Sakura)*

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## Luma Analytics

by OLIVER STEVENSON



With the recent weather making it clear that summer is behind us, 2026 is already in full swing at Luma. We're excited to be continuing our growth, having welcomed Liam Mobbs and Sam

Bailey to the team, as well as two new graduates for 2026, Hanting Yong and Charlie Pocock. We're also looking forward to welcoming Telge Peiris, who will be joining us to lead our Data Engineering team in April.

We've continued to have a presence at university and industry events, engaging with the community and sharing insights into how statistical thinking is applied at Luma. Recently, the team attended an event hosted by the Biomedical Engineering & Engineering Science Association at the University of Auckland, where we participated in mock speed interviews. Events like these are an excellent platform to help students build confidence and give them a taste of what it means to think on their feet in a professional setting. It's also a great chance to connect with the next generation of data scientists, analysts, and engineers.

On a personal note, it was a highlight to attend the NZSA conference back in December and reconnect with the wider statistics community. The conference struck a good balance between methodological depth and practical application, and it was particularly encouraging to see the continued emphasis on bridging the gap between academic research and industry. As always, it was a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas, hear about the diverse work happening across New

Zealand, and reflect on how our own practice continues to evolve.

Of course, AI remains a dominant topic in 2026 – less an elephant in the room, and more so the main event. Tools such as Anthropic's Claude are rapidly changing how statistical and analytical work is approached in practice. We're increasingly seeing opportunities to accelerate elements of the modelling workflow – not by replacing statistical thinking, but by improving efficiency in traditionally time-consuming stages such as exploratory analysis, documentation, and the translation of complex model outputs into something a non-technical stakeholder can act on.

As Luma grows, so too does our social calendar. We've got a full lineup of team events planned for the year ahead and recently kicked things off by attending the recent New Zealand vs. South Africa T20 cricket match at Eden Park – pictured below!



*Attending the cricket match at Eden Park*

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## Fonterra

by LISA THOMASEN



Lisa Thomassen has recently celebrated her 10-year workiversary at Fonterra. She attended the NZSA conference in Dunedin in December where she enjoyed being able to connect in person with many people she'd connected with virtually via the mentoring program. The panel discussion on AI was a particular highlight of the conference.

The R&D stats team, consisting of Lisa and Matt Schroder recently moved to become part of the Health & Nutrition team. As the manager of this team, Maher Fuad will be providing statistical support throughout the next six months while Lisa is on leave. Fonterra has recently upgraded to Minitab Solution Centre which has given us access to new tools including Minitab AI. We are interested to see how these new features can be utilised to improve statistical literacy and rigour for our stakeholders.

Roger Kissling has recently returned from travel to Budapest where he attended the 45th Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling. The committee is a key pillar of the Codex Alimentarius, a joint program established

by the FAO and WHO which exists to develop standards to standardise practices in the trade of foods.

NZ's presentation on the inclusion of sampling plan information along with method information in Codex Standard 234 was well received. Construction of a database for storing method and sampling information is currently underway and Roberto Sciotti of FAO plans to consult with Roger regarding the sampling plan aspects.

The standards developed specify maximum or minimum limits and methods of analysis for each requirement, but most standards do not specify how those requirements are to be enforced, i.e., acceptance sampling plans, to decide whether product complies with those requirements. Acceptance sampling is the recognised scientific [statistical] approach to product inspection; lots are accepted or rejected based on their quality, often measured in terms of the percentage of non-conforming product in a lot. It is valuable for Fonterra to have a voice in these conversations as these standards and the enforcement of them can have a direct impact on Fonterra and the customers purchasing our dairy products.

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## Department of Mathematical Sciences, Auckland University of Technology

by PATRICIO MATURANA-RUSSEL



Continuing a department tradition, we held the 10th AUT Mathematical Modelling and Analytics Symposium at the end of November 2025, attracting around 60 participants from universities in Australia, China, Korea, Macau, New Zealand, and Thailand. The symposium featured 26 presentations, including four invited

talks, covering areas such as actuarial science, applied mathematics, biology, engineering, econometrics, finance, health science, social science, and statistics. As always, the symposium was a great opportunity to share ideas and connect with researchers from different fields.

In line with our department's commitment to fostering community and engagement, another tradition—the Master of Analytics Mix &

Mingle—was held at the beginning of November 2025. This event provided an opportunity for students, alumni, and industry partners to connect and share experiences. On this occasion, Chris Lowe from Valocity delivered a compelling keynote. His message on moving from being a "dysfunctional genius" to a "data coach", emphasizing communication, mentorship, and knowledge sharing, set the tone for an inspiring panel discussion: "Building a thriving data culture: What's working and what's next", featuring Evan Atkinson, Toetu Lafoai, Helen Wu,

and Clarissa Côrtes Pires.

Continuing the year's active engagement, Nuttanan (Nate) Wichitakorn also represented the department internationally, giving two talks at the 2025 Sydney Time Series and Forecasting Symposium at the University of Sydney Business School in late November, and presenting at the Joint Meetings of the 2025 Taipei International Statistical Symposium and the 13th ICSA International Conference from December 17–20 at Academia Sinica in Taiwan.

## Plant & Food Group, BSI

by DUNCAN HEDDERLEY



The former AgResearch and Plant and Food statistics groups got together in Palmerston North at the end of February, along with various people from Scion and Manaaki Whenua who identified as statisticians. It was good to meet new (and went-away-and-came-back) colleagues in person. We have a range of ways of working, from consulting to running projects to writing software that helps researchers analyse their data. Whatever decisions are made about the future structure of stats at the BSI, we were hopeful we had established a will to stay in touch.

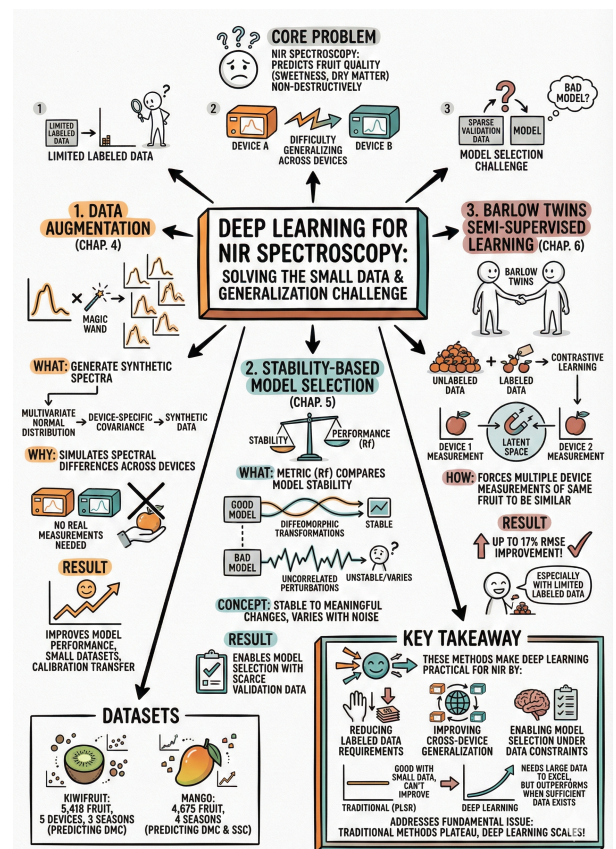


Street art: Squishee the Cat

For out-of-town visitors, Sarah Rosanowski suggested they check out some of the street art near where they were staying, including Squishee the Cat (picture above).

In March Ken Dodds celebrated 40 years of working for AgResearch.

And in January, Mark Wohlers successfully defended his PhD at the University of Waikato. In celebration, he got Gemini to make an info-graphic from his thesis (shown below).

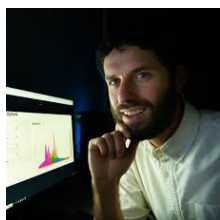


Infographics from Mark Wohlers PhD thesis.

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## School of Mathematics and Statistics, Victoria University of Wellington

by ADAM GLUCKSMAN



The last year has been productive, as usual, for all of us down in the windy capital at VUW. Yuan Yao (Priscilla), Nokuthaba Sibanda, Louise McMillan and Richard Arnold have started a new course at Vic, STAT 395 in Trimester 1, with components of Sample Surveys, Experimental Design, Inference and Communication. This was prompted by Richard's new(ish) position as Head of School and the discovery that he's taught the old Sample Surveys course single-handed for 25 years (!), so some creative re-jigging was needed for this shake up.

Nokuthaba Sibanda returned from a productive RSL, where she spent three months at the University of Queensland in Brisbane on a Raybould Visiting Fellowship at the School of Mathematics and Physics hosted by Dr Matthew Holden. There, she focused on Value of Information in ecological decision making, before going to RMIT in Melbourne for a month to study with A/Prof Yan Wang in the School of Science, and presented at the IBS-AR Biometrics in the Bush Capital conference in Canberra ([link](#)).

Pete Smith is on RSL, working with: Prof. Michalis Matthaiou (School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at Queen's University Belfast) — on pinch antenna systems

and Brownian motion problems; Professor Justin Coon (Department of Engineering Science at University of Oxford) — on network connectivity and spatial search problems; Professor Carl Dettmann (School of Mathematics at University of Bristol) — on network connectivity and the analysis of UAV motion; and Professor Kai Kit Wong (Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering at University College London) — on fluid antennas.

Ivy Liu has just celebrated receiving her 25 Years' Long Service Award, and more significantly, has just welcomed her first grandchild — a future NZSA member, of course.



*Prof. Ivy Liu celebrated the honour of 25 Years' Long Service Award at VUW, pictured here with Vice-Chancellor Nic Smith (who will be taking the position of Vice-Chancellor at the University of Auckland in August).*