

**The 34th annual conference of the International Embryo Transfer Society (IETS)
Denver, Colorado, USA
January 5-9th 2008**

After a fairly uneventful flight from London Heathrow to Denver International airport, Bill Holt and I arrived in the 'Mile High City' (Denver) on the 3rd of January in plenty of time for the pre-conference symposium. In fact, the 4th of January was a free day and so Bill and I embarked on a tour of the Denver area. Several things on this tour were memorable: the tour guide who told really bad jokes (yes, they were definitely worse than mine!), ancient fossilised dinosaur footprints, an amphitheatre built in the mountain between two red rocks and a quaint little town called Evergreen. However, the most irritating thing on this tour was the constant references to buffalo when in fact what we were looking at were bison. We decided on top of 'Lookout Mountain', whilst visiting the grave of the man himself, that a more appropriate name for 'Buffalo Bill' would have been 'Bison William'.

Because we'd had a free day, our jet lag had abated by the pre-conference symposium that was on the 5th of January. The title of the pre-conference symposium was 'Animal Models of Reproduction' and the first speakers of the day (Robert Wall and Robert Taft) were given the task of addressing profound questions such as 'Are animal models as good as we think?' and 'Is the mouse embryo even a good model for the mouse', respectively. As ever, the answer to both questions seemed to be 'yes and no'. Other talks I enjoyed during this all day session included Stanley Leibo's 'Cryopreservation of oocytes and embryos' and Carol Keefer's 'Lessons learned from nuclear transfer (cloning)'. The former because for me Stanley Leibo's talks are always clear and educational and the latter because it really brought home to me the fact that, although several advancements have been made, so many questions still surround cloning, many of which remain unanswered. This is why, in my opinion, cloning is so interesting but I am after all very biased as my PhD days were spent analysing cloned embryos.

On the 6th of January, the main conference programme began. The theme of the conference was 'Needs' and so an array of international speakers took to the stand to give their take on the needs of embryos, students, the society, etc. The most enjoyable talks for me were: Henry Leese's 'Female reproductive tract fluids: composition, mechanism of formation and potential role in developmental origins of health and disease', the student's prize session and Janice Bahr's 'Are scientific societies serving the needs of graduate and postdoctoral students?'. Henry Leese's talk taught me a lot about what I should already know given my current area of study. I often find the students give the best talks, perhaps because they are more conscientious and a lot of the time because they are the most enthusiastic! The winner of this year's student prize was W.T. Farmer from North Carolina State University, USA with his talk and poster entitled 'Detection of antisense to Igf2r (Air) RNA in cattle'. Janice Bahr's talk gave me some new ideas how Vicky Sharp and I, as student/postdoc representatives of The British Andrology Society, can help ensure the needs of our society's students and postdocs are met.

Also, on the 6th of January I presented my poster entitled "A recently identified protein in the oviduct improves the long-term survival of ram spermatozoa during storage at 17 °C in a commercial extender" (abstract number 15). I was pleased that

several delegates came up to talk to me not only about the protein of interest but also the sperm DNA fragmentation assay we've been using. Other posters from my institute that were presented at the conference included Nana Satake's "Phosphoinositide-3-kinase signalling and the control of sperm motility in the porcine oviduct" (abstract number 227) and Pilar Coy's "Species specificity of porcine sperm motility reduction by a high molecular weight fraction of oviductal fluid" (abstract number 222).

Whilst at the conference, because I am very interested in the conservation of endangered species I attended the open meeting of the Companion Animal, Non-domestic and Endangered Species (CANDES) committee. I was incredibly happy to learn that in conjunction with the IETS 2009 meeting, to be held in January in San Diego, a post-conference symposium will be run by CANDES committee. The purpose of this symposium will be to discuss the most recent advances made in applying artificial insemination techniques to CANDES and also to address what more can be done. Taxa of particular concern e.g. amphibians (at least 122 species are believed to have gone extinct within the last 20 years and 500 species are thought to be under imminent threat) will be specifically targeted for this symposium. Indeed, just recently The World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, The World Conservation Union (IUCN) Species Survival Commission Conservation Breeding Specialist Group and the Amphibian Specialist Group have recently formed a consortium; The Amphibian Ark (AArk), to coordinate a global response to this crisis. With the AArk's public awareness campaign that 2008 is "The year of the frog", the CANDES post-conference symposium will be particularly timely.

Having not indulged myself too much at the conference's banquet the night before (although there were temptations: beer, dancing and mechanical bull), I, along with several others took part in the 6th IETS Annual Running Competition. The course was ~ 5 km on an icy pathway that ran alongside Denver's Cherry Creek. Despite the high altitude and some confusion on the direction of the course, everyone completed (or at least I think they did!). Representatives from the UK did particularly well; I was the first female home, with Tony Wrathall of the IETS Health and Safety Advisory Committee (also from the UK) hot on my heels!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank The British Andrology Society and The Society for Reproduction and Fertility for their funding that allowed me to attend this conference, which was both very informative and enjoyable.

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