8th International Symposium: Evolutionary Psychiatry Special Interest Group (EPSIG)

Date: Friday 6 November 2026
Venue: In-person at the RCPsych London Headquarters

Time	Session
9.00am	**Registration**
9.30am	**Welcome and introduction** Dr Riadh Abed, EPSIG Chair
	Plenary 1
9.40am	**Chair: Paul St John-Smith**
	Safety in Numbers: Stress Buffering and Mental Resilience in Tight Knit Groups Dr Paul Keedwell Consultant Psychiatrist, Lewisham Low Intensity Support Team, UK
10.20am	**Hypercuriosity: An evolutionary theory of ADHD** Dr Anne-Laure Le Cunff King's College London, UK
11.05am	**Q & A**
11.25am	**Refreshment break**
	Plenary 2
11.55am	**Chair: Paul St John-Smith**
	Why all psychiatry is not evolutionary psychiatry...yet! Professor Randolph Nesse Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Arizona State University and University of Michigan
12.40pm	**Q & A**
12.50pm	**Charles Darwin Essay Prize winner presentation – Higher Resident: TBC**
1.00pm	**Lunch**
	Plenary 3
2.00pm	**Chair: Annie Swanepoel**

	Charles Darwin Essay Prize winner presentation – Core Resident: Ursula White
2.10pm	**The evolution of imperfection: the science of why we aren't and can't be perfect** Professor Laurence Hurst University of Bath, UK
2.55pm	**Q & A**
3.05pm	**Refreshment break**
	Plenary 4
3.35pm	**Chair: Annie Swanepoel**
	Cowering in Caves? How the archaeological record can contribute to our understanding of modern anxiety Professor Penny Spikins University of York
4.20pm	**Q & A**
4.30pm	**Evolution of music: playing off the beat in psychotherapy** Professor Martin Bruene Ruhr University Bochum, Germany
5.15pm	**Q & A**
5.25pm	**Closing comments** Dr Riadh Abed, EPSIG Chair
5.35pm	**End of conference**

The RCPsych is an inclusive organisation with over 21,000 members who have a diverse range of views, which we look to represent across the programme. To further open dialogue, scientific discovery and enrich learning, we provide our members with the opportunity to hear from a range of professionals. The speakers, panellists and participants views and comments are their own and not the established views of the College.

Speaker biographies

Dr Paul Keedwell

Dr Paul Keedwell is a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists with a longstanding interest in evolutionary psychiatry and the neuroscience of mood disorders. He trained at the Maudsley Hospital and Institute of Psychiatry in London, completed his PhD in the neurobiology of depression at King's College London in 2010, and conducted neuroimaging research at Cardiff University, where he held a senior academic post. His first book, How Sadness Survived (2008), examined low mood, grief and depression through an evolutionary lens. His second, Headspace (2017), applied evolutionary and psychological principles to the built environment, exploring the

biophilia hypothesis and the radical mismatch between the cities we have constructed and the environment in which we evolved. His forthcoming book, Disconnected, to be published by Cambridge University Press early next year, extends this argument across the full breadth of human social life - from the collapse of communal support and alloparenting to the rise of digital disruptors - making the case that most psychiatric disorder is a predictable consequence of asking a deeply prosocial species to function in an increasingly competitive, atomised and unequal world.

Dr Anne-Laure Le Cunff

Dr Anne-Laure Le Cunff is a UKRI-funded neuroscientist at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. Her research in the ADHD Research Lab focuses on the neurodevelopmental and evolutionary basis of hypercuriosity. She holds a PhD in Psychology and Neuroscience and an MSc in Applied Neuroscience, both from King's College London. Beyond academia, Dr Le

Cunff is the founder of Ness Labs, an educational platform that teaches knowledge workers how to apply an experimental mindset to support creativity, productivity, and mental health at work. She is the author of *Tiny Experiments* (Penguin Random House, 2025) and previously worked on Google's digital health team.

Professor Randolph Nesse

Randolph M. Nesse, MD is Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of Michigan where he led the residency training program and helped to develop one of the country's first Anxiety Disorders Clinics, while leading the university's Evolution and Human Adaptation Program for 15 years. In 2014 he founded the Center for Evolution Medicine at Arizona State University where he continues as a Research Professor after retiring from teaching. His research on evolution and aging led to a collaboration with the evolutionary biologist George Williams that initiated new work in evolutionary medicine. His current mission is to show how the principles of evolutionary medicine can strengthen the scientific foundation for psychiatry. He is a Fellow of the AAAS, a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, and a Fellow of the Society for Psychological Science. He founded the Human Behavior and Evolution Society in 1988 and the International Society for Evolution, Medicine & Public Health in 2014. His recent book, *Good Reasons for Bad Feelings: Insights from the Frontier of Evolutionary Psychiatry* has been described as seminal for evolutionary psychiatry.

Professor Laurence Hurst

Laurence Hurst is Professor of Evolutionary Genetics at The Centre For Evolution, University of Bath UK, of which he was the Founding Director. He works on fundamental problems in the evolution of genetic systems often with application to medicine. He was elected a Fellow of the

Academy of Medical Sciences (FMedSci) and a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) in 2015. He was a recipient of the Humboldt Prize (2024), the VC Research Medal (2015), the Scientific Medal of the Zoological Society of London (2003), the Darwin Award of the BA (2000) and was elected a member of European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO) in 2004. He was awarded The Genetics Society Medal in 2010 and was its President from 2018-2021. Aside from being on the editorial board of multiple journals, he is on the Scientific Advisory Board of ExpressionEdits and

the Advisory Board of PlosB. He is the author of one book, *The Evolution of Imperfection* (Princeton University Press 2025), an attempt to synthesise why humans are particularly genetically challenged.

Professor Martin Bruene

Martin Brüne is Professor of Psychiatry and Head of the Division of Social Neuropsychiatry and Evolutionary Medicine at the LWL University-Hospital, Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany. Dr Brüne has authored more than 300 articles and book chapters. He has also authored the Textbook of Evolutionary Psychiatry and Psychosomatic Medicine: The Origins of Psychopathology (2nd edn. Oxford University Press, 2016). He served as the Editor (together with Prof. Wulf Schiefenhövel) of The Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Medicine (Oxford University Press, 2019), and as a Co-Editor of The Evolutionary Roots of Human Brain Diseases (Oxford University Press, 2024). Dr Brüne is a member of several psychiatric and neuroscientific societies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie, Psychotherapie und Nervenheilkunde (DGPPN), International Society for Human Ethology (ISHE), Gesellschaft für Anthropologie (GfA), and the International Graduate School of Neuroscience (IGSN), Ruhr-University Bochum.

Professor Penny Spikins

Penny is Professor of the Archaeology of Human Origins at the University of York. Her research particularly focuses on how archaeological evidence can contribute to our understanding of human social and emotional dynamics. She has published several books and many articles in this field, including concerning the evolution of neurodiversity (particularly autism), attachments to objects, care for the vulnerable, and trust and emotional commitments. Penny's latest book, 'Hidden Depths: The origins of human connection' (White Rose University Press, open access) builds on her previous volume 'How Compassion Made Us Human' (Pen and Sword) in arguing that a selection for pro-social emotional motivations has been the driving force behind human evolution. She particularly explores how at each stage in our evolutionary past changes which lead to human success came alongside new sensitivities and vulnerabilities. and how this understanding changes our view of ourselves.