

Archived Items from the Department of Biology – Texas State University “Announcements” Webpage

2015 - 2016

Two Texas State Biology students received awards at the Southwestern Association of Naturalists meeting which took place in Mexico City this year. Amanda Driscoe (Advisor: Dr. Jim Ott) was granted a Howard McCarley Student Research Award to fund her thesis work entitled, “Genetic divergence of a specialized herbivorous insect as a function of geography and host plant.” Additionally, Kathryn Michelle Benavidez (Advisor: Dr. Iván Casro-Arellano) received a Clark Hubbs Student Poster Award for her presentation entitled, “Leptospira prevalence in small mammals on Puerto Rican dairy farms.”

Kathryn Michelle Benavidez, a current MS student in the Biology Department (Wildlife Ecology program, Advisor: Iván Castro-Arellano), was accepted into a PhD program in the Anthropology Department at Indiana University. She was additionally awarded the prestigious McNair Graduate Fellowship which provides her with tuition, stipends, and health insurance for the duration of her PhD. At Indiana University she will join the Primate Environmental Endocrinology Lab (PEEL) to study diet and behavior in wild primate populations at Barro Colorado, Panama.

The 21st Annual Biology Student Colloquium, sponsored by the Tri-Beta Biology Honors Student Association, the Graduate College, and the Biology Department at Texas State University, was held on February 26, 2016. Graduate (M.S. and Ph.D.) students participated with 23 oral presentations and 19 poster presentations.

Katie Seideman-Barclay won for Best Poster Presentation,

Lichen Xiang won for best oral presentation in the PhD program

Sara Robertson won for best oral presentation in the MS program.

The 22nd Annual Biology Student Colloquium will be held Friday, Feb 24, 2017.

Three M.S. degree-seeking students in the Dept. of Biology have been awarded Freeman Ranch Center Scholarships. The \$3,000 scholarships, awarded on the basis of research proposals, provide a stipend, and support for each student’s research project.

Wesley Collins, M.S. student in the Population and Conservation Biology Program. Proposal title: Can an invasive perennial grass be selectively controlled by modifying fuel loads during prescribed fire?

Amanda Driscoe, M.S. student in the Population and Conservation Biology Program. Proposal title: Genetic Divergence of a Specialized Herbivorous Insect as a Function of Geography and Host Plant.

Anna Marie Matthews, M.S. student in the Wildlife Ecology Program. Proposal title: Insights into nest-site fidelity and season survival of the Bewick’s wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) in central Texas.

The Texas State University Student Chapter of the Wildlife Society recently attended the 52nd Annual Meeting of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society. Thirteen students and faculty participated in oral

and poster presentations and eight students participated in the Wildlife Quiz Bowl and Plant ID competition. Sara Weaver, doctoral student (Advisor: Dr. Ivan Castro-Arellano,) received the Sam Beasom Memorial Scholarship. Aaron Hudnall, undergrad student in Wildlife Biology, won "Best in Show" in the photography competition. Dr. Randy Simpson was recognized as a Honorary Lifetime Member of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society.

Andrew MacLaren (current PhD student in Aquatic Resources who earned his M.S. in Wildlife Biology) has won The Graduate College's Outstanding Master's Thesis Award in the Life Sciences. His thesis, "Automated Detection of Rare and Endangered Anurans Using Robust and Reliable Detection Software" was directed by Dr. Michael Forstner, Professor of Biology. Andrew will receive \$500 and will be recognized at The Graduate College's Awards Ceremony next April.

Zara Flores, an undergraduate student studying at Texas State under the Bridges to the Baccalaureate Program, was recently honored with a 2015 SACNAS Student Presentation Award at the 2015 National Conference of the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science. Zara's work, titled "Development of Gfap Expression in the Optic Nerve of Zebrafish", is advised by Dr. Dana Garcia.

Pedro "Pete" Gonzalez (M.S. Thesis student, Advisor: Dana Garcia) was awarded a Thesis Research Fellowship from Texas State's graduate college. Funds from the fellowship will support his research exploring aging-related changes in the optic nerve of zebrafish.

Golya Shahrokhi (M.S. Thesis student, Advisor: Dr. Clay Green) won the Best Student Poster Presentation award at the 39th Annual Meeting of the Waterbird Society in Bar Harbor, Maine. Her poster presentation was on "Gene flow between distinct management units of the Reddish Egret". She was recognized at the Awards Banquet of the Waterbird Society and presented with a certificate and \$250 cash award.

Congratulations to Dr. Adam Duarte, a recent graduate of the Ph.D. program in Aquatic Resources. Adam has won The Graduate College's Outstanding Dissertation Award in the Life Sciences. His dissertation, "Population Dynamics and Habitat Conservation for the Golden-Cheeked Warbler (*Setophaga chrysoparia*)", was co-directed by Dr. Floyd W. Weckerly, Professor of Biology, and Dr. Jeff S. Hatfield, Research Ecologist at the U.S. Geological Survey. Adam will receive \$1,000 and he will also compete in the Council of Graduate Schools' competition for best dissertation in the Life Sciences.

The Instream Flow Council honored Dr. Thomas Hardy, the Meadows Professor of Environmental Flows, in April with their Lifetime Achievement Award. The award was presented at the Council's Symposium in Portland, Oregon on April 28, 2015.

The award celebrates Dr. Hardy's distinguished career of excellence at Utah State University and then at Texas State University where he mentored future experts in the art and science of instream flows. The award also commemorates Dr. Hardy's foundational work on multidisciplinary assessment methods, tools, and technology.

The Instream Flow Council is a non-profit organization made up of all fifty states in the U.S., Canadian provinces, and territorial fish and wildlife agencies working to improve the effectiveness of instream flow programs and activities for conserving fish and wildlife and related aquatic resources. This award highlights the long standing and continuing work of Texas State's Aquatic Biology program and Department of Biology.

Dr. Caitlin Gabor has been nominated and approved for a Visiting Erskine Fellowship at Canterbury University in New Zealand. She will live in Christchurch for one month (May 2016) while co-teaching a course in Neurons, Hormones and Behavior. This fellowship comes on the heels of a Fulbright Specialist Grant to give seminars and do research in Hungary (May 2015).

This 20th Annual Department of Biology Colloquium was another success. Many thanks to the 28 students who presented this year. In the unanimous opinion of the judges, all students had very well prepared oral and poster presentations.

Best talk at the MS level: April Bonnard with co-authors Yogendra Bordiya, Ji Chul Nam and Hong-Gu Kang: Characterizations of chromatin remodeling factors in disease resistance in plant immunity.

Runner-up: Andrew MacLaren with co-authors Michael Forstner and Shawn McCracken: Teach your computer to be a better listener: A lesson on development and implementation of automated audio recognition tools.

Best talk at the PhD level: Katherine Bell, with co-authors Premal Shah, Romina DiMarco, Chris Nice and James Fordyce: Exploration of the evolutionary landscape of chemical sequestration using a model system.

Runner-up: Thilanka Jayaweera with co-author Nihal Dharmasiri: IBR5, a dual specificity phosphatase, regulates SCF dependent protein degradation.

Best Poster: Elia Lopez with co-authors Praveen Kumar Kathare, Thilanka Jayaweera and Nihal Dharmasiri: The function of ROP GTPase in plant auxin response.

"Where have all the flowers come from? Over a century ago, Charles Darwin labelled the evolution of Angiosperms (flowering plants) an abominable mystery. Indeed, their ancestral ecology continues to be a subject of ongoing scientific debate. Recent work highlighted that low transpirational cooling rates would have confined primitive angiosperms to shaded habitats, ostensibly resolving this scientific controversy. However, through modelling fossil leaf temperatures, researchers at University of Nottingham and Texas State University (Dr. Gary Upchurch, Department of Biology) have demonstrated that small leaf size could have protected some early angiosperms from overheating, enabling survival in

the sun. Thus, the early angiosperms could have occupied a variety of habitats, once again reviving the debate. This research has been recently published in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B. "

Congratulations to Dr. Caitlin Gabor, Professor of Biology, for being the 2015 honoree for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Scholarly/Creative Activities.

Adam Duarte, Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Biology (Dr. Butch Weckerly, advisor), was awarded the Clarence Cottam Award at the 51st annual meeting of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society. This competitive award is given to recognize and promote outstanding student research efforts and comes with a \$500 monetary award. The title of Adam's talk was "Estimating Golden-cheeked Warbler Immigration: Implications for Conservation".

Nicholas Kolbe, M.S. student in the Department of Biology (Dr. Butch Weckerly, advisor) was awarded the Dan Boone Memorial Scholarship at the 51st annual meeting of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society. The Dan Boone Memorial Scholarship commemorates Dan Boone who passed away while conducting bald eagle surveys in 1995. Dan graduated from Texas A&M University and was a biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife who focused on conservation of lesser-known species for more than 20 years. The scholarship was given to Nicholas for his achievements in the field of wildlife management and academic accomplishments.

Daniel C Huston (B.S. in Wildlife Biology 2011, M.S. in Biology 2014) was awarded a University of Queensland International Scholarship (approximately \$108,000) to pursue his Ph.D. in Queensland, Australia studying larval trematode ecology and taxonomy in the Great Barrier Reef. For his M.S. Thesis at Texas State University (Major Advisor: Dr. David Huffman), Daniel studied the invasive trematodes *Centrocestus formosanus* and *Haplorchis pumilio* of Central Texas.

The Texas State University student chapter of the Wildlife Society had a very busy 2013-2014 year. Among the numerous student chapter activities included participation in the WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) conference, volunteer work at the San Antonio Zoo, Wildlife Extravaganza in Bastrop, trail maintenance and clean up at Enchanted Rock State Park and spearheading a prairie restoration project at Warbler Woods near Schertz, Texas. All of the hard work and efforts of the student chapter culminated in the chapter being selected as the Outstanding Student Chapter of the Year award at the Annual Meeting of the Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society.

Kate Bell, Ph.D. student (Dr Chris Nice, advisor) and Rebekah Rylander, M.S. student (Dr. Clay Green, advisor) were recently awarded Freeman Fellowships through the Freeman Center at Texas State University. These fellowships include \$3,000 in funding for tuition assistance and research support.

Troy Maikis, M.S. Student in Wildlife Ecology under the supervision of Dr. Ivan Castro-Arellano, was awarded the William B. Davis award for best oral presentation at the Texas Society of Mammalogists annual meeting in Junction, Texas. The title of Troy's talk was Tick Prevalence from Rodent Assemblages at Peridomestic and Sylvan Sites across Texas. The William B. Davis award comes with a \$400 honorarium.
