



# Notes from the Field

April 2004

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## Program Chair Corner

Snow yields to rain, soil temperatures warming, spring peepers calling, marbled salamanders are migrating, ah... the signs of Spring are on us. For many that means the onset of a new field season, for others deadlines for dissertation copies. Much good has occurred these past few months. From my point of view none is bigger than getting our Fall course offerings in place. A big thanks to the newly formed Ecology Curriculum Committee for conceptualizing the redesigned *Classical Ecology* and *Advances in Ecology* courses. *Classical Ecology* will be taught by Dr. Eric Post this Fall and has been expanded from one to two credits. *General Ecology* will be replaced by the team-taught *Advances in Ecology*. Headed up by Dr. Peter Hudson, *Advances* will be taught as a series of interconnected modules spanning ecology of species interactions, ecophysiology, population genetics and evolutionary ecology. The course will provide an opportunity for students to explore cutting edge issues in ecology with a range of Ecology IGDP faculty. The core requirement of General Ecology will be replaced by *Advances in Ecology*. *Advances* and *Classical Ecology* (both core requirements for our program) will be offered in the Fall of each year.

At our November meeting, several of you suggested we enhance communication about goings on in the program. One action that's been taken is enhancements to our web-page. Many thanks to Jenny Edwards and Glenna Malcolm for their work on the page. A second development is *Notes from the Field*. Our newsletter (thanks to Jenny Edwards ideas and follow-through on this project) will go to press the last week of each month. Please help with project, we need to hear from you. Ideas about funded projects, awards, newcomers, papers of interest, announcements, coordinating travel to regional and national meetings, all (almost) is fit to print. WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU. Submissions should be sent to Jenny Edwards (jme145@psu.edu)

I'd like to highlight an important event that should be on everyone's calendars. The Ecology Mini-Symposium will be held Thursday evening April 15 from 5-8:30pm in 118 ASI Building. Our Mini-Symposium is a time for our learning community to come together to meet new members of the program, hear from students finishing their dissertation studies, present the Bellis and Horton awards and finally to enjoy time together. Food and drink will be provided. All are strongly encouraged to attend.

~ David Mortensen

A group of eight graduate students and post docs from the Penn State University Biology and Ecology graduate programs attended the second **Northeast Ecology and Evolution Conference (NEEC)**, held at The University of Connecticut in Storrs, from March 26 to 28. Apart from the oral presentations and posters, we also enjoyed the wonderful talks given by two very influential scientists in our fields, Dr. Kelman Wieder, NSF Program Director for Ecosystem Studies, who enlightened us on the topic of "Writing successful grants" and Dr. Michael Soule, University of California, Santa Cruz, whose talk was entitled "Towards Effectiveness: New Paradigms in Ecology and Action". The conference was very well attended, with over 150 participants, 86 oral presentations and 45 poster presentations which included a number of disciplines ranging from Molecular Ecology and Speciation to Community and Ecosystem Ecology and Conservation Biology. Last year's conference was held at Rutgers University in New Jersey, and next year's host University for the NEEC is to be determined by the current organizing committee based on the proposed university's background program, funding availability, facilities and support from the university and faculty. Maybe we can start thinking of hosting the conference for next year!!

~Nora Peskin Ecology M.S. Student

## Let's Welcome...



**Sarah Perkins** joined Ecology in Feb 2004 as a post-doc working in the newly created 'Center for Infectious Disease Dynamics' (CIDD). Sarah is working with Peter Hudson and Ottar Bjornstad to co-ordinate the interdisciplinary research projects of CIDD. Within CIDD Sarah will also develop her own research focusing on parasite community dynamics, specifically the interactions between microparasites and macroparasites within hosts. Sarah did her PhD at Stirling University, Scotland and Centro di Ecologia Alpina, Italy, studying the transmission heterogeneities of tick-borne diseases in small mammals. Sarah enjoys snowboarding, windsurfing and hiking and is looking forward to exploring the American countryside.



**Olav Skarpaas** finished his PhD at the University of Oslo in 2003. He came to Penn State to pursue his research interests are population ecology and its application to conservation and management. In collaboration with Dr. Shea and others, he is developing models to predict the rates and patterns of spread of the two invasive thistles *Carduus nutans* and *C. acanthoides* on a range of spatial scales. The empirical basis for the modeling is an array of population biological studies conducted by the Shea lab. He is responsible for wind dispersal studies aimed at measuring and modeling dispersal kernels. Olav enjoys good books, good meals and traveling. He plays soccer on the departmental team and enjoys outdoor life, in particular, cross-country skiing.



**Isabella Cattadori** moved to Penn State at the end of August 2003 as a joint Post Doc in the labs of Peter Hudson and Ottar Bjørnstad. Isabella is interested in population ecology, in particular temporal and spatial dynamics where she has used *galliform* species as study cases. Recently, Isabella started exploring the mechanisms regulating host-parasites interactions working on a population of rabbit and its community of parasites. Isabella likes restoring wood furniture, African music and ethnic art, and is keen on traveling through the American continent.

**Ecology Alum Recruits Students** – John Young, a 1979 Ecology IGDP grad is recruiting to fill a position opening (one full-time and possibly a part-time position) in his company *ASA Analysis and Communication*, a consulting firm well known for its environmental impact work in freshwater ecosystems in the northeast. Seeking a MS graduate with good writing, data analysis and organizational skills. Interested persons should contact John Young at [jyoung@asaac.com](mailto:jyoung@asaac.com) or (814) 278-0487.

## Noteworthy

**Jack Shultz** was recently named distinguished professor for recognition of his outstanding contributions to Penn State University. This special academic title is intended to recognize a limited number of outstanding professors. Dr. Schultz is a professor of entomology in the College of Agricultural Sciences. He is a leader in the emerging field of chemical ecology, studies chemically mediated interactions among plants, insects, microbes and vertebrate predators.

**Ylva Besmer** was recently awarded the Alumni Association Dissertation Award. This award is considered to be among the most prestigious available to Penn State graduate students and recognizes outstanding achievement in scholarship and professional accomplishment. Her research has focused on the interactions among mycorrhizal fungi, rhizobium bacteria and legumes. The specific objectives have been to document the indigenous inoculum potential of AMF in subsistence farmer's fields in Zimbabwe, research ways to enhance the abundance of AMF through common management practices, and determine the legume response to an increased fungal abundance.

### Schedule of Events:

April 1 *Program Social Zolas 5:30 pm*

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jme145@psu.edu*

April 7 *EGSO Mtg Panera 5:30 pm*

April 15 *Mini-Symposium 118 ASI 5 pm*