

# Notes from the Field

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## ESA 2006 in Memphis, Tennessee

~ Randa Jabbour, Dept. of Entomology

The Penn State Ecology program was well-represented at the 2006 Ecological Society of America meeting in Memphis, Tennessee, contributing well over twenty presentations. Eleven students and post-docs traveled by van (generously provided by the Ecology program). Highlights of the trip included Trivial Pursuit, the name game, sing-alongs (Queen's Greatest Hits), and dinner at the "Country Kitchen" (our first dose of sweet tea).



Memphis welcomed the influx of ecologists warmly with a banner on Beale Street and lots of smiles. Some Penn Staters took in the sights at the Civil Rights Museum and Graceland. We ate VERY well all week, concluding with ribs from Rendezvous.

The meeting provided thought-provoking symposia (theory for empirical systems, ecology & poverty, environment & health, icons/upstarts), numerous contributed sessions, and not enough coffee. We caught up with former colleagues and made new friends in the hallways. I was thrilled to meet people that days ago only existed to me as names on articles and books. It was exciting and overwhelming to be surrounded by all these ecologists and to be able to place our work in the context of everything happening. Overall, our visit to the meeting was a success!

## 600 Mycorrhiza Researchers Sighted in Granada, Spain

~ Glenna Malcolm, Dept. of Horticulture

On July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2006 I went on a trip to Granada, Spain in order to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Mycorrhiza (ICOM5). Aside from my obvious excitement regarding spending time in the lovely country of Spain, I was excited to share my dissertation research with everyone. In the field of mycorrhizal fungal ecology, few people are exploring climate change impacts on mycorrhizal fungi or the place of these mutualists in the terrestrial carbon cycle. My poster, entitled, 'Respiration Acclimation and Adaptation to Temperature by Ectomycorrhizal Fungi,' attempts to address a piece of this area of up-and-coming research.

ICOM5 went from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of July and was filled with rich discussion on mycorrhizal fungal topics ranging from organismal to ecosystem patterns associated with them to their practical application for agriculture, phytoremediation, etc. Dr. Roger Koide, member of the IGDP in Ecology, along with Dr. Ylva Besmer and Dr. Ian Dickie, former graduate students in the IGDP in Ecology, were also in attendance. Each delivered excellent talks regarding elements of mycorrhizal community and/or functional ecology. Dr. Koide also co-chaired a session of invited speakers, entitled, 'Biodiversity and ecological impacts.'

Beyond hearing stimulating talks about mycorrhizal fungi for five days, the opportunity to network and interact with other mycorrhizal fungal specialists from around the world was priceless for me. The organizers set up many social engagements where informal discussion might occur after hours, including the 5<sup>th</sup> annual 'Wines of the World' night (everyone brought a bottle of wine to be judged) and an evening tour of the Alhambra, a Moorish fortress containing five palaces of varying ages. On our last day in Granada, a few of us strolled around the old Arabic quarter, called Albaicín, and also walked up to the

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Sacromonte in order to watch some authentic flamenco dancing in a gypsy cave.

My trip continued from there. Krista McGuire, a graduate student from the University of Michigan, and I went exploring in the southeastern, Almeria region, of Spain. We traveled from the Sierra Nevadas, through the valleys dotted with olive and almond trees, to the coastline. We also spent a day in Seville and a day in Barcelona, after a missed flight.



Academically, culturally, and personally, I feel

this trip to Granada, Spain and beyond was an important one, one that I will carry with me for a long time.

## Snowbird Charrette: Environmental Research Design in Snowbird, Utah

~ Kevin Mueller, Dept. of Horticulture

For a few days in late August, 48 graduate students from across the U.S. met at Snowbird, Utah to participate in an interdisciplinary exercise in environmental research design. Penn State was well represented with three individuals coming from the Ecology program (J.B. Moon, Kevin Mueller, and Ruscena Widerholt) and another student from the Geosciences Dept. (Aaron Regberg). The “Snowbird Charrette” was a project sponsored by NSF and co-hosted by Arizona State University and the Social Science Research Council. The event was billed as an opportunity for graduate students to tackle current environmental issues in teams consisting of peers from natural and social sciences with an interest in environmental science. However, the event turned out to have two distinct goals: 1) to see if teams of graduate students from different disciplines can come up with innovative approaches to a current environmental issue determined by a group of experts, and 2) conduct a replicated social science experiment to determine if certain elements of graduate student training allow for greater ease in the pursuit of interdisciplinary science (e.g. compare

IGERT students vs students from traditional departments).

The question each group of six students received was directed at studying human interactions with an ecosystem service(s) of our choosing. The goal was to produce a novel (surprise) 5-7 page research proposal having significant contributions from the natural sciences and social sciences. Two and a half days after receiving the question, each group handed in their proposals and presented their work in front of the other students, the charrette organizers, and a panel of experts. As you might expect, this was quite a challenge and made for an intense weekend, but my impression is that most of us enjoyed the opportunity to interact with folks that share general interests but come from different scientific backgrounds and disciplines. Of course the scenery at hand from our ‘base camp’ at 8,000 ft. in the Wasatch mountains didn’t hurt either (nor did the free food or mini-stipend!).



Look for a note/news piece in *Nature* sometime in September (or so) about the event if you are interested, or go to <http://snowbirdcharrette.ssrc.org> for a more official blurb. Future plans from the event organizers/PI’s include a possible book and potentially making this an annual event. As for the proposals, I am not convinced anyone is going to give us the hypothetical ten million dollars we budgeted for, but I think all the groups did pretty well and the experience makes me a bit more optimistic about the future of our planet!

### Upcoming Events

**Zola’s Social** Thursday, September 21<sup>st</sup> @ 5:30

**Colloquium** Thursday’s @ 12:30 in 12 Life Sciences

**Fall Seminar** Monday’s @ 1:25 in 118 ASI