

The Sixth Annual Darwinian Student Symposium

Lincoln Park Zoo, April 5, 2009

On Sunday April 5, 2009, the Department of Ecology and Evolution (E&E) and the Committee on Evolutionary Biology (CEB) co-sponsored the Sixth Annual Darwinian Student Symposium, a forum for students working in the ecological and evolutionary sciences from molecular genetics to paleobiology. This year's event was held at the Lincoln Park Zoo. Students and faculty members from E&E, CEB, the Department of Organismal Biology & Anatomy, and the Department of Geophysical Sciences attended. The day was filled with student talks, culminating in a group discussion on professional development.

Twenty-three students gave conference-style presentations of their research this year, providing both an opportunity for practice giving professional talks as well as an opportunity to receive constructive comments from peers and faculty. The diversity of presentation topics reflected the range of interdisciplinary research within the ecological and evolutionary community at the University of Chicago. On display was a diverse array of conceptual questions from the genetic mechanisms of speciation to the evolutionary basis of play behavior, addressed using a variety of organisms, including mammals, fishes, insects, mollusks, plants, fungi and birds. In addition to laboratory work, students presented field research conducted in North America, Africa, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Oceania.

Phylogenetic talks focused on the evolutionary relationships among bacteria (Rebecca Budinoff), the value of morphological integration (Annat Haber), relationships among the diverse tropical Tanagers (Aaron Savit) and cryptic speciation in a Malagasy songbird (Nick Block). Talks in animal behavior focused on the importance of play behavior (Matt Heintz), cooperative mobbing in birds (David Wheatcroft), feeding behavior in caterpillars (Libby Eakin), hormonal correlates of parental care (Michelle Rafacz), and personality as a complex phenotype (Andrew Dosmann). Genetics talks consisted of a study of reproductive isolates in *Drosophila* (David Turissini), the evolutionary implications of genetic regulatory architecture (Kevin Bullaughey), the genetics of acid tolerance (Eric Hungate), hybrid inviability (Daniel Matute), and the origin of new genes in *Drosophila* (Ben Krinsky). Sexual selection talks included a study on

divergence in Old World warblers (Elizabeth Scordato), song in fairy-wrens (Emma Greig), coloration in warblers (Natasha Bloch), and post-copulatory sexual selection in macaques (Cindy Carlson). Ecology talks included work on predator-prey dynamics (Will Tyburczy), mussel communities (Aaron Kandur), and disease modeling in gypsy moths (David Kennedy). Other students spoke about adaptations to extreme soil environments (Sara Branco) and nocturnal primate eye structure (Edna Davion).

The day concluded with a discussion that focused on strategies for funding student research and planning for postdoc and tenure-track positions after completion of the Ph.D. This discussion was relevant to both beginning and advanced students, as it provided a timeline for submitting grant proposals, making professional contacts, and developing competitive job applications. The input of faculty members and advanced graduate students made the discussion lively and informative.

As in previous years, this year's symposium required a lot of effort from many people who deserve recognition and special thanks for their work. Dan DiLuciano and Libby Eakin organized transportation. Sue Margulis and Elizabeth Lonsdorf arranged the venue at Lincoln Park Zoo. The day's schedule was developed by student volunteers Sophie McCoy and Dave Kong Kennedy. CEB Chair, Mike Coates, moderated the roundtable discussion. Planning is already underway for the Seventh Annual Student Symposium to be held in Spring 2010. We invite everyone with an interest in ecology or evolution to attend!

Revised: May 13, 2010