



TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program



May Graduate



Caleb Catlett has been EEB's student worker for three years. This spring, he graduated with his Bachelor of Science in Ecology & Conservation Biology. After graduation, he will be working in Alaska for the summer before he returns to College Station as an RWFM master's student researching otters.

Thank you for all your hard work and dedication, Caleb!

Special Election



A special election was held for a new Chair-elect.

Welcome back!

DR. SPENCE BEHMER

Professor

Department of Entomology

Thank you to Dr. Hojun Song for serving as the Chair-elect for the past year.



Take a moment to read "[Beetles, Biology, and a Second Chance: The Story of Dr. Heath Blackmon](#)"

to learn more about the EEB Chair and his journey in academia.

Welcome! 2025-2028 Elected Chairs

DR. COURTNEY FITZPATRICK

- Seminar Chair
- Assistant Professor
 - Department of Biology



DR. JOSHUAH PERKIN

- Outreach Chair
- Associate Professor
 - Department of Ecology & Conservation Biology



DR. JESSICA LIGHT

- Communications Chair
- Professor
 - Department of Ecology & Conservation Biology

DR. MARIE STRADER

- Assessment & Reporting Committee (ARC) Chair
- Assistant Professor
 - Department of Biology

You Will Be Missed!

Wishing Our Faculty Success in Their New Endeavors

- Dr. Hojun Song - Director of Biocollections and Professor, School of Life Sciences, Arizona State University
- Dr. Rachel Moran - Assistant Professor, Department of Ecology & Evolution, University of Chicago
- Dr. Kira Delmore - Associate Professor, Department of Ecology Evolution & Environmental Biology, Columbia University





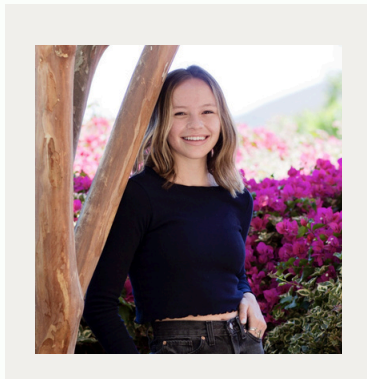
MSC LT Jordan Fellow - Institute for International Awareness - 2025 winner (L): Isis Davis, Fitzgerald Lab
Breann Richey, Lawing Lab (R) was the invited speaker at the 37th LT Jordan Fellows Banquet as last year's award winner.



Ruby Mustill
Fitzpatrick Lab

- NSF GRFP Honorable Mention
- American Mammologist Society Research Grant

Serena Farrell
Behmer & Sword Labs
NSF GRFP Honorable Mention



Adam Bower
Brightsmith Lab

- Academy for Future Faculty Certificate Program
- GRAD AGGIES certificate
- Schubot Center Avian Research Travel Grant



Congratulations
to the recipients of
EEB's \$1500 Research
Grant!



Oluwaseun Ajileye & Ali Lira-Olgun, Light Lab

Keith Andringa, Grace Lab

Carolina Bertuol, Voelker Lab

Alister Brown & Allison Collins, Gursky Lab

Loris Di Vozzo, Lawing Lab

Tom Dodson, Perkin Lab

Ben Lake, Yorzinski Lab

Ruby Mustill, Fitzpatrick Lab

Tabitha Olsen, Butler Lab

Skai Peterson, Helms Lab

Sierra Sanders, Casola Lab

Nicole Stevens, Fitzgerald Lab

Brooke Torjman, Armitage Lab

Malith Viduranga, Spalink Lab

Shelbie Weaver, Blackmon Lab



Congratulations on being Admitted to Candidacy (L to R):
Alanna Noland, Mateos Lab; Oluwaseun Ajileye, Light Lab;
Maria Hurtado, Lawing Lab; Carolina Bertuol, Voelker Lab;
Nicole Stevens, Fitzgerald Lab

2025 Dissertation Fellowship Winners

Breann Richey, Lawing Lab
Griffin Nicholson, Fitzgerald Lab



Passed Preliminary Exams



Matthew
Marano
Casola Lab

Leo Collazos
Veldman Lab

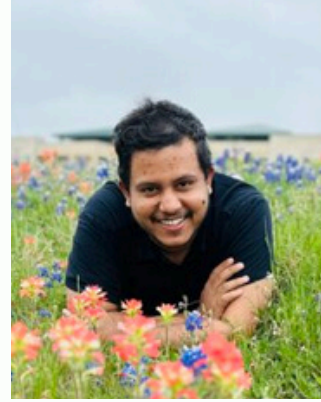
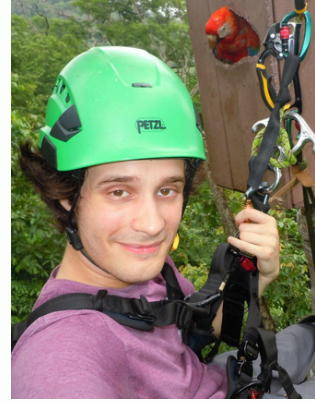


Adam Bower
Brightsmith
Lab



The Annual Graduate and
Professional School Awards
Ceremony and Reception was
held on April 24th.

- Dr. X. Ben Wu (ECCB),
Outstanding Graduate &
Professional Student
Mentoring Award for
Faculty



Congratulations, and thank you for your willingness to selflessly serve your fellow graduate students! Meet your newly elected 2025-2026 EEBISO Leadership (from L to R):

President: Oluwaseun Ajileye, Light Lab

Treasurer: Ruby Mustill, Fitzpatrick Lab

Outreach Representative: Serena Farrell, Behmer & Sword Labs

Events Representative: Adam Bower, Brightsmith Lab

Seminar Representative: Malith Viduranga, Spalink Lab

Thank you to our 2024-2025 EEBISO Leadership Team for all their hard work: Vivian Peralta Santana (President), Steve Caird (Treasurer), Shannon Harris (Outreach Representative), Ruby Mustill (Events Representative), and Audélie Mechti (Seminar Representative).

New EEB Core Faculty

DR. ERICK MOTTA

- Assistant Professor
- Department of Entomology

His research work is primarily centered in the field of microbial ecology, in which he investigates organismal interactions in host-associated microbial communities and how environmental stressors play a role in such interactions.

Congratulations!

2025 SEC Professor of the Year

Dr. Bill Murphy

Murphy, a National Academy of Sciences member and University System Regents Professor (VIBS), is Texas A&M's third recipient of the SEC's highest faculty honor.





Meredith Anderson, S. Hamer Lab, was featured in an article in the University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) One Health Newsletter in April. Read about [“Dr. Meredith Anderson: Investigating Pesticide Exposure in Birds and its Public Health Impact”](#) to learn more.”



Oluwaseun Ajileye

Light Lab

- 2025 COALS Research Improvement Grant
- Texas Ecolab Research Grant
- ECCB Publication Grant
- 2025 AAVP Young Investigator Travel Grant



[Dr. Matt Moulton](#) and Dr. Alex

Keene have been awarded \$200,000 by the [WoodNext Foundation](#) for their project titled *Functional Assessment of Dementia Risk Genes and Pharmacological Interventions*.



Dr. Sanjay Antony-Babu is a CO-PI on an [AgriLife Research](#) team to develop [nitrogen-saving sorghum hybrids](#) with [\\$3.8 million in DOE support](#).

Huge shout out to the Blackmon and Fitzpatrick Labs for their participation in the Brown Bag Lunch. They gave talks at 5 of the 7 meetings this semester!

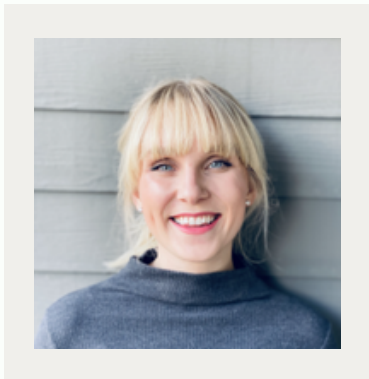


Dr. Jorja Burch, 2025 Biology graduate under the mentorship of Dr. Heath Blackmon, received the prestigious 2025 Presidents' Award from the Society for the Study of Evolution. [Her award highlights the critical role of epistasis in evolution.](#)



The College of Arts & Sciences Faculty Awards Ceremony was held on April 29 (L to R):

- Dr. Sharon Gursky (ANTH), Research Impact
- Dr. Darryl de Ruiter (ANTH), Faculty Excellence
- Dr. Anne Raymond, Professor GEOL - Service



Andie Miller
Sword Lab
Beltwide Conference
1st Place PhD Student
Presentation: 15-min talk



Eli James
Sword & Song Labs
Beltwide Conference
2nd Place PhD Student
Presentation: 15-min talk



Congratulations!

Since 1955, The Association of Former Students and Texas A&M University have recognized outstanding members of Texas A&M's faculty and staff for their commitment, performance, and positive impact to Aggie students, Texas citizens, and the world around them.

- 2025 University Level Distinguished Achievement Award - Teaching, Dr. Lee Fitzgerald (ECCB)
- 2024 College Level Distinguished Achievement Award - Teaching, Dr. Heather Thakar (ANTH)





The Ecological Integration Symposium (EIS) was held on March 20th and 21st at Texas A&M University. (L to R): Dr. A Townsend Peterson (Univ. of Kansas), Adam Bower*, Steve Caird*, Kylie Perez*, Dr. Julian Olden (Univ. of Washington), Dr. Jessica Hellmann (Univ. of Minnesota), Dr. Geoffrey Hill (Auburn Univ.), Benton Fry*, Dr. Mark Moffett (Smithsonian), Dr. Jonathan Levine (Princeton Univ.), Malith Viduranga*

* EIS 2024-2025 Planning Committee



Skai Peterson
Helms Lab
EIS 2025
1st Place 15-min Oral
Presentation



EIS celebrated 25 years this March. Dr. Lee Fitzgerald was also honored for his 25 years of dedicated service as an advisor!



Say hello to your 2025-2026 EIS Planning Committee. Welcome to your new role! Please email [Ben Lake](#) if you're interested in joining the committee.

- Ben Lake, EEBL
- Gisel Garza, ECCB
- Brooke Dominici, ECCB
- Mycha Van Allen, VIBS
- Sara Al-Naabi, WMHS



EEB was proud to host a record-breaking 46 booths, the most ever in Darwin Day history at Texas A&M! Participants included lab groups from Texas A&M College Station and Galveston, the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History, local wildlife handlers, nature artists, local businesses, and many more. Thanks to your incredible support, we made a lasting impression on over 1,500 visitors who explored the Gardens. We appreciate your willingness to be a part of Darwin Day and help us celebrate science, nature, and community!



Huge thank you to Icarus Nellson for designing and painting the new Darwin & Wallace photo stand-in.

To view more of his work visit: <https://linktr.ee/Icarusfbx>

Recruiting Travel Grant Awardees

This year, Darwin Day coincided with EEB's annual recruiting event, making the celebration especially exciting and impactful. We were thrilled to host 10 students at TAMU, where they quickly embraced our traditions and community.





Tabitha Olsen, Butler Lab, had her work featured in the U.S. Geological Survey's *Notes from the Field* series. Check out "[What's on a sparrow's dinner menu](#)" to learn more about sparrows and the importance of bird banding.



Audélia Mechti, Sword Lab
Entomological Society of
America Student Competition
Graduate SysEB: Behavior 1 -
2nd Place 10-min talk

Jackson Linde, Song Lab
Entomological Society of
America Student Competition
Graduate SysEB: Morphology
and Phylogenetics - 2nd Place
10-min talk



Dr. Mason Clark, Sword Lab
Entomological Society of
America Student
Competition
Graduate PBT: Genetics and
Molecular and Cellular
Biology - 2nd Place 10-min talk



Read how Dr. Giri
Athrey's featured
[study predicts
long-term drop in
chicken fertility
rates.](#)

Cara Cash, POSC PhD student,
published [statistical analyses
forecasting further declines in
'hatchability' by 2050.](#)



[Peek into the past: Ancient
ecosystems may be the key to
a changing planet.](#)

The Lawing Lab was featured
in The Battalion for their
research on analyzing 50,000
teeth to model a framework
for conservation practices.



The Department of Ecology & Conservation Biology Awards Ceremony was held on April 17 (L to R):

- Excellence Award in Undergraduate Teaching - Dr. Joe Veldman
- Excellence Award in Graduate Teaching - Dr. Claudio Casola
- Excellence Award in Early Career Research - Dr. Michelle Lawing
- Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award - Griffin Nicholson



Malith Viduranga
Spalink Lab

- American Society of Plant Taxonomists - Vicki A. Funk Graduate Student Research Grant
- Botanical Society of America - (Inaugural) AJ Harris Graduate Student Research Award



Benton Fry
Winemiller Lab
Harry Tennison Scholarship by the Sportsmen's Club of Fort Worth

Research Feature!



New research published in [Science](#) is reshaping our understanding of one of nature's most stunning yet destructive phenomena – [massive locust swarms moving together](#).

[Read](#) about how a team of researchers, including Dr. Greg Sword are challenging the long-standing theories about how order emerges from disorder in animal collectives.



Dr. Jenna Hulke, earned her Ph.D. in Biology in August 2024 under the mentorship of Dr. Charles Criscione. She earned the Texas A&M University Graduate and Professional School's 2025 Distinguished Dissertation Award in Biological and Life Sciences. Congratulations! Hulke and Criscione were also featured in the American Society of Naturalists Forthcoming Papers Issue: *Parasite party: how inbreeding begets a complex life cycle.*



Adeyinka Aduragbemi
Spalink Lab
2025 COALS Research
Improvement Grant



Ali Lira-Olguin
Light Lab
Texas Ecolab
Research Grant



Dr. Juliana Rangel's Lab won at the Entomological Society of America's Southwestern Branch Meeting in March:

- Keegan Nichols: 1st Place PhD 10-min talk
- Tara Lanning: 3rd Place Undergrad Poster

Dr. Tonya Shepherd:
Outstanding Achievement in Teaching



EEB ISO hosted another successful crawfish boil in April. Once again, Gabe and Sarah Hamer offered up their home for the party allowing everyone to take advantage of their beautiful property. There was even a small fireworks and potato gun show! Huge thanks to all that gave of their time to cook and prep especially Gabe Hamer's PhD student, Abdisalam Abdi. Fabulous job! Thanks to everyone that brought a dish to share too.



Thank you to those that donated towards the silent auction and bid on items. The silent auction raised over \$500 for the ISO and the BRTC.

Featured Research in Science

New research reveals older animals' role in species survival.

Dr. Kirk Winemiller aids global study on how longevity conservation helps wildlife populations: "Loss of Earth's old, wise and large animals,"





Dr. Chris Butler collaborated with National Park Service's Inventory and Monitoring Division, Padre Island's National Park staff and other researchers to survey the presence of eastern black rails and their distribution in the park. [Learn about the importance of these coastal habitats in species conservation.](#)

Dr. Christine Merlin was highlighted by the *Trasmitter* for her pioneering work using the monarch butterfly as a non-model organism for circadian and navigation research. Read about how [*The non-model organism "renaissance" has arrived.*](#)



Congratulations to Dr. Mary Wicksten and Dr. Alan Pepper on celebrating 45 and 30 years, respectively, in the Biology Dept!

Hello,
babies!



Dua Noor
Ali-Simpson
November 8

Daniel Alexander
Aduragbemi
January 23



Pierce Harrison
Toohey
January 31

Elyse Marie
Richey
March 18



Saskia Love
Latham
April 29

Gus Wilder
Grace Schmit
May 5





Dr. Jamie Alfieri, former EEB student under the mentorship of Dr. Heath Blackmon, won the 2024 Outstanding Student Paper Award from the American Genetic Association (AGA) and will present his research at the 2026 AGA Conference. Read how his research shows that domesticated birds are more likely to hybridize—a breakthrough with big implications for evolution, agriculture, and biodiversity.



Kiedon Bryant
Moran Lab
Sigma Xi Grant



Dr. Sarah Hamer and Georgia scientists have been featured for their research. Learn how they are “Protecting Homeland Security working dogs from Chagas disease.”

Dr. Hamer was also named a 2025 Chancellor Enhancing Development and Generating Excellence in Scholarship (EDGES) Fellow by The Texas A&M University System. Congratulations!

farewell!

Jennifer Bradford has accepted a new role as the Associate Director of Graduate Advising in the School of Public Health at Texas A&M. Jackson Linde will be moving to Arizona to join his current PI, Dr. Hojun Song, at ASU and finish out his PhD.

Postdocs Dr. Colton Watts, Dr. Alex Howard, and Dr. Daemin Kim are moving to Minnesota, England, and Chicago, respectively.

We wish you all the absolute best in your new surroundings and careers. You will be missed around EEB!

