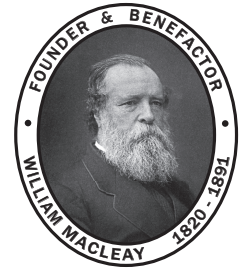




THE LINNEAN SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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The Joyce W. Vickery Scientific Research Fund

Dr Joyce Winifred Vickery M.B.E. (1908-1979)

Joyce Vickery, one of Australia's leading botanists and a pioneer Australian woman scientist, spent most of her working career (before and after retirement) at the National Herbarium of New South Wales, Royal Botanic Gardens. Joyce Vickery (appointed Assistant Botanist in 1936) actively supported the new Chief Botanist, R.H. Anderson, in raising the standards of one of Australia's oldest and most important botanical centres.

Her appointment broke new ground in several ways. Joyce Vickery was the first woman to be appointed as a scientific professional officer in the NSW Public Service and she flatly refused to accept the lower starting salary for a female officer. She held out for, and gained, a more appropriate higher salary based on qualifications rather than sex!

Dr Vickery was an ardent early supporter of the Nature Conservation cause in N.S.W. and was closely involved in the campaign to set up the then Kosciusko State Park, Elouera Bushland Reserve (now Berowra Valley Bushland Park) and Muogomarra Sanctuary. Her practical support included a generous donation of an adjacent block to enlarge the Elouera Reserve.

As an interesting sidelight, Dr Vickery's botanical knowledge was put to good use in the forensic field in the notorious "Bradley Case". Her presentation of evidence led to the conviction of the murderer of young Graham Thorne based on the evidence of plant fragments associated with his dwelling. This forensic contribution was later recognised by the award of an M.B.E.

In 1960 Joyce Vickery also received the Clark Medal of the Royal Society of N.S.W. in recognition of her many contributions to botanical science in Australia.



History of the Fund

The fund began in 1952 with a donation of 10 pounds from Mr Armstrong of Nyngan after he read an article in the Graziers Association journal. The research fund remained static until 1971 when the Linnean Society received an anonymous donation of \$1000. From then until 1978 two anonymous donations of \$1000 were received annually. It became an open secret that the donor was none other than Dr Joyce W. Vickery, a member of the Linnean Society since 1930 and an active Council member since 1969 and latterly its Honorary Treasurer, 1971-1978.

Joyce Vickery's long-term aim was to revitalise a fund which could actively support scientific research in the natural sciences and achieve some worthwhile objective for the Society. She envisaged a time when the capital invested would produce sufficient interest to support good scientific research projects. Following her death in May 1979 the Linnean Society's Scientific Research Fund received a substantial boost of almost \$34,000 from Joyce Vickery's estate, raising the capital to a level where the fund could become operational.

Shortly afterwards, by unanimous decision of Council, the fund was renamed the Joyce W. Vickery Scientific Research Fund in recognition not only of her financial generosity but also her many years of active support for the Society.

John Francis Noble Award

Each year the Council of the Linnean Society of NSW may designate one of the recipients of the Joyce W. Vickery Scientific Research Fund as the recipient of the John Francis Noble Award.

John Francis Noble (1916 – 2011)

In March 2012, the Linnean Society of NSW received a donation of \$50,000 from the estate of the late John Francis Noble. The bequest has been invested in a separate term deposit, with half the annual interest to be made available from within the Vickery Fund, and the interest is to be made available to students for invertebrate research. John Noble clearly recognised the importance of supporting invertebrate research generally, and, as part of this, he wanted to encourage and support spider research.

Grants Awarded

Since 1980 the Society has made available annually, in individual grants to research workers throughout Australia, a proportion of the interest from the capital invested in the Joyce W. Vickery Scientific Research Fund. The remainder is reinvested to increase the capital and to try to maintain the value of the fund against the effects of inflation. How successfully this has been achieved can be judged from the following figures:

Year	Capital invested	No. grants	Total Awarded
1980	\$49,914	1	\$300
1981	\$56,186	3	\$1,235
1982	\$63,284	9	\$3,331
1983	\$68,182	10	\$3,020
1984	\$74,510	7	\$2,813
1985	\$79,353	12	\$5,240
1986	\$83,343	16	\$4,590
1987	\$92,204	17	\$8,160
1988	\$99,933	17	\$6,782
1989	\$104,963	13	\$6,250
1990	\$114,167	20	\$8,552
1991	\$135,894	13	\$6,417
1992	\$144,044	13	\$5,924
1993	\$154,173	10	\$5,126
1994	\$160,009	16	\$5,850
1995	\$166,595	16	\$6,100
1996	\$176,042	12	\$6,450
1997	\$241,758	11	\$5,730
1998	\$242,046	12	\$7,700

Year	Capital invested	No. grants	Total Awarded
1999	\$242,325	22	\$5,900
2000	\$265,699	26	\$6,250
2001	\$256,012	9	\$5,500
2002	\$281,010	19	\$8,100
2003	\$305,875	15	\$7,700
2004	\$315,638	17	\$7,050
2005	\$322,982	19	\$7,800
2006	\$336,672	16	\$7,400
2007	\$347,733	13	\$8,404
2008	\$363,638	13	\$9,408
2009	\$397,177	6	\$7,465
2010	\$418,914	13	\$12,020
2011	\$437,492	11	\$9,551
2012	\$502,218	13	\$12,200
2013	\$528,484	13	\$13,050
2014	\$550,621	10	\$12,700
2015		14	\$13,300
2016		12	\$11,500

2016 Awards

Recipient: Mr Kye Adams, University of Wollongong

Project: Does recreational fishing initiate abortion in a common elasmobranch?

Synopsis: Characteristics of low fecundity, late maturation and slow growth rate are shared by many elasmobranchs, including sharks, rays and their relatives. Large scale and prolonged fishing activity puts them at risk. Many sharks and rays are caught by recreational fishers, with up to 82% being discarded. A baited remote underwater video showed that fiddler rays in the no-take zone of Jervis Bay increased by 90% over 4 years when compared with a recreationally fished zone. One reason could be abortion during capture and release. Stress induced abortion is especially common in yolk-sac (aplacental) viviparous species, common in many species of rays. Southern fiddler rays have a relatively low fecundity of an average of three embryos per breeding cycle and this species is rated at high risk. This project aims to determine if abortion could be responsible for the reduced number of juveniles in fished areas where ray species are commonly discarded. The study will capture the rays by SCUBA that does not cause abortion and use ultrasound to determine pregnancy and count embryos.

Awarded \$1,200

Recipient: Ms Phoebe A Burns, University of Melbourne

Project: Environmental determinants of smoky mouse (*Pseudomys fumeus*) population fluctuations.

Synopsis: The smoky mouse has a disjunct distribution and is found in a wide diversity of habitats. Species in the group exhibit short-term fluctuations but whether the population is sustainable is inconclusive from the few surveys available. This study will examine seasonal variation and whether it has a relationship with soil moisture as a proxy for rainfall, since rainfall figures are not available over much of the area. Predator pressure may also be a factor as the Victorian National Parks predator abatement programs differ in the parks where this survey will be conducted. Generally, native rodents have been in decline since European colonisation.

Awarded \$1,800

Recipient: Mr Ricardo De Paoli-Iseppi, Australian Antarctic Division, University of Tasmania

Project: Molecular biomarkers for seabird age estimation; implications for ecological monitoring.

Synopsis: The chronological age of an animal is a critical factor in many biological processes that can change with time. In animal populations, age-class distribution is both a determinant of current growth rate and a reflection of past growth rates and may reveal the effects of harvesting and other impacting human influence. This study will use epigenetic biomarkers that have proven successful in age estimation in mammals but have not been applied to birds. The sampling method for DNA will be validated on a population of known aged short tailed shearwater, the most abundant seabird in southern Australia. The method will then be applied to the population on Fisher Island (off Flinders Island) that has been studied and banded for 40 years.

Awarded \$800

Recipient: Daniel C Huston, University of Queensland

Project: Evolutionary radiation of enenterid and gorgocephalid trematodes in Australia.

Synopsis: Digenetic trematodes are a group of extraordinarily diverse parasites. Their life cycle has a main vertebrate host and a secondary invertebrate host, almost always a mollusc. There may be more than one invertebrate host. Two of the lesser-known families, Enenteridae and Gorgocephalidae have diversified almost entirely in the fishes of the family Kyphosidae. This family of circum-global herbivorous fishes is at its highest diversity in Australian waters. The taxonomy of the parasites is very confused and that of the host fishes is uncertain in many cases. Sites from north Queensland to southern Australia will be sampled and the taxonomy of the parasite studied using both morphology and molecular genetics.

Awarded \$800

Recipient: Ms Caitlin Morrison, University of Sydney

Project: Developing toll-like receptor (TLR) markers for studying how disease impacts the orange-bellied parrot

Synopsis: The orange-bellied parrot is critically endangered with only about 20 individuals remaining in a

wild population. It is one of only two obligate migratory parrot species. Despite release of captivity-bred individuals and other recovery actions, the wild population has continued to decline. Risks now include low genetic diversity, inbreeding depression, disease and loss of habitat. This project aims to develop markers for the innate immune system genes, the TLR, that can be used in future studies to assess risks of disease. The TLRs are a family of genes involved in the innate immune system in animals and are the first line of defence against pathogens. Ten TLRs in birds have been characterised to date. Particular diseases may be associated with variation in particular TLRs, eg tick-borne disease with TLR2 in rodents. Two TLRs known to be associated with viral diseases in parrots will be targeted.

Awarded \$800

Recipient: Mr Ben A Parslow, Flinders University

Project: Systematics and host associations of the Australian Gasteruption (wasps)

Synopsis: This study examines the association between the wasps and their host, native bees, using molecular phylogeny to investigate possible co-evolution. The current 113 described species will be reviewed. Traps will be placed at sample sites. The traps consist of bundles of bamboo 6-10 mm wide as these bees are solitary and most nest in dead plant stems. Successfully parasitised nests will be collected and allowed to develop in the laboratory.

Awarded \$500

Recipient: Ms Julia Ryeland, Western Sydney University

Project: Home range and fine scale habitat use of the emu: management implications for an Australian icon.

Synopsis: Emus are an incredibly adaptable species and are abundant in semi-arid environments. They are known to migrate up to 550 km to areas with an abundant food supply. Emu habitat requirements have been inferred solely on presence and absence, scat densities or from farmed populations yet their home range is unknown. Emu behaviour has been deduced from farmed populations and is unknown for the wild. This project aims to gain quantitative data on home range size, genetic diversity, how they use their habitat and what their daily behaviour patterns are. How does an urban populations compare with the rural populations? This information is important in managing populations of emus. While emus are found across most of Australia, increasingly few sightings are reported from the central arid zone and the north. Is this what we would expect from climate change?

Awarded \$1,200

Recipient: Miss Charlotte Simpson-Young, University of New South Wales

Project: Assessing the success of ecological restoration using plant functional traits

Synopsis: The recovery of plant communities after disturbance from human activity is not well understood. Restoration attempts tend to be site specific and it is difficult to generalise about methods and outcomes. This project aims to use plant functional traits (PFT) to understand and predict patterns of recovery following human disturbances across habitats. PFTs (e.g. plant height, seed size, leaf architecture, tissue density etc.) relate to how plants adapt to given environmental conditions and are broadly comparable across species. The study will test the hypotheses 1) FPT diversity in remnant bushland communities around Sydney will decrease over time and 2), remnant bushland communities with high FPT diversity will also have greater resilience and capacity to persist (e.g. high resistance to invasive species and high native seedling establishment).

Awarded \$600

Recipient: Ms Claire Sives, School of BEES University of New South Wales

Project: Microcrustacean egg bank adaptations: now and under climatic change.

Synopsis: Aquatic microcrustaceans are extremophiles: when ephemeral lakes dry up, the eggs persist in baking hot, desiccated sediments in a resting egg stage. They are known to remain viable for up to 15 years and thrive in the “boom or bust” conditions of Australia’s harsh semi-arid zone. As lakes fill, eggs hatch and microcrustacean life explodes, driving the food web and the wetland “boom”. The resting “egg bank zone” is the top 2.5 cm that may be blown away in wind storms. This project will investigate the present conditions that the egg bank survives and survival under likely conditions of a future climate change.

Awarded \$1,800

Recipient: Mr Joshua R. **van Lier**, Australian National University

Project: How acute habitat disturbance affects seaweed associated fishes in the Ningaloo ecosystem.

Synopsis: Tropical seaweed meadows cover vast areas of coastal ecosystems and are home to a wide diversity of tropical fish. Focusing on the fish family Labridae (includes the wrasses and parrotfishes), this study aims to determine the extent of specialisation among the seaweed associated fishes and how they respond to an unseasonal loss of meadow habitat over the short (weeks) to medium (year) time scales. Canopy height of the seaweeds is an important driver of fish abundance, so canopy height will be reduced up to 50% and the fish surveyed before and after this manipulation.

Awarded \$1,000

Recipient: Miss Maria L **Voitto**, Macquarie University

Project: Density dependent effects of transplanting Sydney rock oyster onto sea walls to enhance native biodiversity

Synopsis: Seawalls lack complex microhabitat and provide less surface area for organisms to attach as compared to natural habitat. Furthermore, non-native species rapidly colonise free space on newly constructed seawalls. The Sydney rock oyster is an important habitat-forming species and the complex structure provided by the oysters protects associated species such as invertebrates and juvenile fishes. Competition for space increases with density and predatory mortality decreases with density, hence oyster growth and survivorship may depend on density. Can we accelerate development of diverse native marine communities and reduce colonisation of non-native species by seeding seawalls with a habitat-forming oyster species? This study also aims to determine optimal density of oysters to use when ecologically engineering newly constructed seawalls.

Awarded \$500

Recipient: Mrs Catherine **Young**, Australian National University

Project: Relatedness and extra-pair offspring in the group-living crimson finch.

Synopsis: Crimson finches use rank grasslands for food and nest in *Pandanus* across northern Australia. They are the only finches to live and breed in stable colonies the year round. There is competition for mates with colonies having more males than females. The faithfulness of the males to their partners is unknown, but in other group-living species, up to 90% of extra pair paternity has been found. This project will take blood samples for DNA determination to establish paternity.

Awarded \$500

John Noble Award for Invertebrate Research

Recipient: Mr **Thomas Semple**, Australian National University

Project: *Phylogenetics, ecology and novel taxonomic techniques in thynnine wasps.*

Synopsis: There are currently 474 species of thynnine wasps listed in the Australian Faunal Directory and an estimate of at least 1000 additional known but not described species. Thynnines are depicted as a dominant group, second only to ants across much of Australia. This project aims to establish the first broad scale phylogeny of the thynnine wasps using DNA sequencing. Fresh DNA is required for some genera, requiring field work. As well, 3D imaging using the immensely promising x-ray micro computed tomography allows imaging of external and internal features of tiny organisms on the micro scale. This means a 10 mm wasp can be scanned at a 3-micron resolution, allowing examination of individual hairs. The immense datasets generated from scanning will be available to anyone for future study.

Awarded \$2,000

Surrey Jacobs Award for Scientific Field Work

Recipient: Mr **Jack Tatler**, University of Adelaide

Project: *Spying on dingoes in the desert: new insights into the behaviour, energetics and resource selection of free ranging dingoes (Canis lupus dingo)*

Synopsis: Determining how an apex predator, such as the dingo interacts with its environment is of paramount importance for the conservation of ecological communities, and for predicting conflicts with livestock enterprises. Behaviour in the wild under natural conditions is particularly difficult to study. This project will remotely monitor animal-attached sensors (on collars) on free-ranging individuals to determine behavioural states, make predictions about energy expenditure and understand how dingoes utilise their geographic range through time by measuring their selection of resources.
Awarded \$1,500

2015 Awards

Recipient: ADAMS, Kye (University of Wollongong)

Project: Site fidelity and habitat preference of banjo shark, *Trygonorrhina fasciata*; implications for Marine Protected Areas.

Synopsis: Soft sediment habitats have a diverse fish community which is a significant component of coastal biodiversity. They support important commercial and recreational fisheries worldwide. Marine protected areas represent a management strategy implemented to conserve marine biological diversity and include extensive soft sediment habitats. The aims of this study are to: i) Quantify the fine scale movement of banjo sharks, in a no-take sanctuary zone within Jervis Bay Marine Park; ii) Quantify the larger scale movement patterns of banjo sharks within Jervis Bay; and iii) Use the movement data to assess the effectiveness of marine reserve design in managing populations of this commercially caught by-catch species. Studying movement, as a key life-history characteristic, will assist in sustainable management of this species. A spatial closure to fishing such as a no-take zone is unlikely to have any effect if the movement of the “protected” fish covers an area much larger than the area closed to fishing.

Awarded: \$1,500.00

Recipient: CHAPLIN, Kirilee (Museum Victoria)

Project: Taxonomy, ecology and conservation genetics of grassland earless dragons (Agamidae: *Tympanocryptis* spp.) in Queensland.

Synopsis: The taxonomy and systematics of Australian earless dragons (*Tympanocryptis* spp.) have been unclear for decades, due to the genus containing numerous cryptic species (evolutionary divergent lineages that cannot be distinguished morphologically). More recent integrative taxonomic work has furthered our understanding of the evolutionary history and phylogenetics of the genus, and has resulted in the description of three new species of grassland earless dragons: *T. wilsoni*, *T. condaminensis* and *T. pentalineata*. These species occur in highly fragmented grasslands of rural Queensland around Roma, the Darling Downs and Normanton, and form a species-complex with the wide-spread *T. tetraporophora*.

Awarded: \$1,500.00

Recipient: COLLINS, Timothy (University of New England)

Project: Rare and endangered *Eucalyptus magnificata* L.A.S. Johnson and K.D. Hill (Myrtaceae) : genetic diversity and taxonomy.

Synopsis: There are two main aims to this research: 1) to resolve the taxonomic uncertainties in *Eucalyptus magnificata*, given that some northern populations near Tenterfield and Warwick are currently designated as *E. aff. magnificata* and *E. cf. magnificata*. 2) to determine long-term survival prospects of *E. magnificata* by examining distribution of genetic diversity. To address the first aim, phenetic analysis of morphology as well as analysis of genetic data with both hierarchical and non-hierarchical approaches will be used. To address the second aim, the hypothesis that larger populations have higher genetic diversity, a greater range of demographic viability and better overall health leading to better long-term survival prospects will be tested. Thus my study will inform conservation and land

management in particular for *E. magnificata* and be of more general import.

Awarded: \$750.00

Recipient: FABIAN, Belinda (Macquarie University)

Project: Functional biology of extrafloral nectaries of Australian native wild cottons (*Gossypium* sp.) from the arid zone.

Synopsis: This project focuses on the functional biology of extrafloral nectaries and associated nectar in Australian native cotton species. The overall aim is to establish a link between the structure and function of extrafloral nectaries by examining the composition of phloem, extrafloral nectar and the histochemistry of the extrafloral nectary cells. Existing knowledge about wild *Gossypium* is scant with no body of research on the functional aspects of these arid zone plants. The specific aims of this project are: i) To reveal novel aspects of the physiology of wild *Gossypium* species; ii) to establish the chemical composition of the extrafloral nectar and phloem of Sturt's Desert Rose; iii) To establish the effect of elevated atmospheric CO₂ on the production and composition of extrafloral nectar of the Sturt's Desert Rose; and iv) to determine ant preference for extrafloral nectar and phloem of Sturt's Desert Rose.

Awarded: \$750.00

Recipient: HACKING, Jessica (Flinders University)

Project: Factors shaping disease-resistance-gene diversity in the tawny dragon lizard (*Ctenophorus decresii*).

Synopsis: Wildlife disease, and the mechanisms involved in disease resistance are poorly understood. This is concerning because disease is among the top five causes of species extinctions worldwide. The ability to resist disease is largely controlled by diversity at key immune system genes (disease-resistance-genes). As a result, disease-resistance-genes are often used as markers for population health and adaptive potential in conservation biology and evolutionary ecology. However, knowledge on disease-resistance-gene diversity and the factors generating and maintaining diversity is conspicuously lacking in reptiles. As Australia has an extremely high diversity of reptiles this is a critical issue for reptile conservation in this country. Due to the role that disease-resistance-genes play in the immune system, it is often assumed that parasite-mediated selection maintains diversity at these genes. Disease-resistance-gene markers developed in this project will be used to quantify diversity at disease-resistance-genes in the tawny dragon and examine the selective forces maintaining this diversity. Understanding the evolution of disease-resistance-genes is a vital first-step before these genes can be used as markers to study Australian dragon lizard conservation biology and evolutionary ecology. The overarching objective of the study is to examine the selective forces influencing disease-resistance-gene diversity, namely, parasite-mediated selection and sexual selection.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: JAYAWEERA, Anuradhi (Macquarie University)

Project: Effect of sexual cannibalism on male ejaculatory expenditure and female receptivity in false garden mantids.

Synopsis: Sexual cannibalism causes huge costs for species where cannibalism occurs prior to copulation and males may lose all their current and future reproductive successes. Female false garden mantid *Pseudomantis albofimbriata* attacks males prior to copulation and only 40% males succeed in transferring sperm to their partners while being cannibalised. Therefore, it is predicted that male *P. albofimbriata* should have evolved preference for less risky females or they may approach females cautiously to avoid being eaten. However, surprisingly, it is found that males do not respond to the risk of sexual cannibalism and approach females regardless of the risk of cannibalism. Further, recent male mate choice model developed based on a praying mantid mating system suggests low mate encounter rate may override all other factors responsible for the evolution of male mate choice in this system. In the proposed study I will compare male mating resource investment between cannibalised and non-cannibalised males and also female attractiveness between cannibals and non-cannibals which will

add more clarification to why male mate choice is not readily evolving in these systems. The major objective of the proposed study is to determine the effect of sexual cannibalism on male postcopulatory mating strategies, thereby gaining a clearer understanding of the costs and benefits of precopulatory cannibalism in praying mantids. More specifically I will examine whether cannibalised males transfer more sperm to their partners in order to maximize their reproductive success. Further, males of some animals transfer accessory gland products (AGP) with the ejaculate, which function to decrease female receptivity (Simmons 2001). If cannibalised males do transfer large ejaculates (i.e. more sperm), they may also transfer more AGP to their partners. I will compare the attractiveness of mated cannibals and mated non-cannibals to determine whether cannibalism results in less attractive females.

Awarded: \$500.00

Recipient: KEMP, Anne (Griffith University)

Project: Environmental degradation will destroy the Australian lungfish.

Synopsis: Populations of the Australian lungfish, *Neoceratodus forsteri*, are endemic in the Burnett, Mary and Brisbane Rivers, and the lungfish in the Pine River system may also be natural. Three major problems affect all of these river systems. The population of adult lungfish suffered during the recent prolonged drought in southeast Queensland, but the floods that have followed since the drought ended have killed many hundreds of adult lungfish, because flooding causes water impoundments to overflow, and lungfish are washed over the reservoir walls and smashed into the spillways below the wall. The other two threats are purely man made. Eggs and newly hatched lungfish depend on submerged water plants for survival. Eggs are laid on the plants, and hatchlings hide there. In a natural flowing river, refuges and food are plentiful and normal young are produced. Refuges do not usually exist in reservoirs because the water level fluctuates, and the plants and food animals cannot survive around the shore. The third threat affects adults and young in reservoirs. Eggs and hatchlings do not survive because adults have so little food that they cannot provide the eggs with appropriate nutrients, and the eggs develop abnormally. All the young produced in a season die. How widespread is the problem? So far only three localities have been examined for poor development and total loss of recruitment. The same abnormalities occur in all three, in eggs collected from the wild and raised in the laboratory, and in late stage embryos and hatchlings found in the wild and not exposed to laboratory methods. New spawning sites need to be identified, in rivers and lakes, and eggs from these sites collected and reared to see if they are also abnormal. An analysis of environmental conditions, such as refuges and the availability of food animals, should also be done for these sites. Armed with this information, it may be possible to repair the situation for lungfish.

Awarded: \$500.00

Recipient: LAIRD, Melanie (University of Sydney)

Project: Unlocking amniote live birth: the “other” mammalian model.

Synopsis: The main aim of this project is to identify the uterine changes involved in preparation for pregnancy in marsupials to understand the importance of uterine changes in the evolution of live birth (viviparity). Specifically, this project will address three main questions: i) What uterine changes occur during pregnancy in marsupials?; ii) Are these uterine changes a general feature of marsupial pregnancy? and iii) Are there common changes required for pregnancy in all viviparous? Addressing these fundamental questions is essential for understanding the role of these changes in marsupial pregnancy and, more broadly, in the evolution of live birth from egg-laying in mammals.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: MORRIS, Timothy (University of New South Wales)

Project: The effect of dingoes via kangaroo regulation on vegetation, seed banks and soil nutrients.

Synopsis: Recent studies have identified the important role that top predators have in the functioning of ecosystems through top-down regulation. Because top predators have strong effects on the populations and behaviour of herbivores, they have the potential to influence biochemical pathways through controlling

the intensity and spatial organisation of herbivory. Grazing by herbivores can influence nutrient cycling and the above and below ground nutrient pool, limiting the nutrients available to detritivores and in turn the uptake of nutrients by plants. Hence, the regulation of herbivores by top predators could influence these pathways and ultimately the energy available for consumers within the entire ecosystem. This project focuses on the keystone role of the dingo as a trophic regulator in the Strzelecki desert region. Dingoes strongly regulate kangaroo populations on the western side of the dingo fence, but are prevented access into NSW. The absence of top-down regulation of kangaroo populations in NSW has strong cascading impacts on the vegetation community through overgrazing. Whilst the effects of dingoes and kangaroo grazing on vegetation cover and composition have been studied, the effects of kangaroo grazing on plant traits, seed banks and soil nutrients are poorly understood. This project will test two distinct research aims: i) Determine the extent to which the dingo influences vegetation structure/composition, seed banks and soil nutrients through predation on kangaroos and ii) Detect differences in the physical traits of *Aristida contorta* in response to non-lethal kangaroo grazing.

Awarded: \$1,500.00

Recipient: NOBLE, Mae (Australian National University)

Project: Population biology & ecology of the threatened Murray crayfish in upland streams.

Synopsis: Murray crayfish (*E. armatus*) are an iconic species recognized by people across the Murray-Darling Basin. However, they have experienced serious declines in abundance and are now listed as a threatened species across three Australian states and the Australian Capital Territory. While relatively well studied in lowland streams, we have very little knowledge of their upland population biology and ecology. I plan to fill this knowledge gap by using in-stream snorkel surveys and environmental measurements in concert with multivariate modeling to evaluate their environmental and habitat preferences at multiple spatial scales within upland streams of the Murrumbidgee River in NSW.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: PENALBA, Joshua (Australian National University)

Project: The genomic origin of species: A case study in the Australian Meliphagoidea. **Synopsis:** Unraveling the mechanisms underlying the process of speciation has been pursuit of evolutionary biologists since Darwin. The rich, continental-scale Australian vertebrate biodiversity provides a powerful framework to take a comparative approach in studying this process. Although it takes millions of years for speciation to complete, many pairs of populations are currently existing at different stages of this trajectory: incipient species. The objectives of this project are as follows: 1) Test the prediction that genome-scale introgression is inversely proportional to population divergence; 2) Test the prediction that divergent regions in the genome expand to neighboring regions in species-pairs further along the speciation process; 3) Test the prediction that phenotypic divergence serves as a proxy for gene flow and 4) Shed light on the role that hybridization may play in speciation.

Awarded: \$800.00

Recipient: RUEEGGER, Niels (Southern Cross University)

Project: Factors influencing roost selection by Australian tree hollow-using bats.

Synopsis: Forestry, mining, farming and urbanisation are threats to wildlife worldwide due to loss or degradation of habitat. One aspect of habitat clearing is the loss of hollow-bearing trees which provide shelter and breeding habitat for hollow-using fauna. Echolocating bats (microbats) comprise a large proportion of mammal biodiversity worldwide and many species use hollows for roosting and breeding and as such are affected by large scale losses of hollow-bearing trees in Australia and abroad. One approach for managing bat roosts in areas depleted of hollow-bearing trees is the installation of artificial hollows. The proposed aims for the artificial hollows study are: i) Investigate the effectiveness of broad scale bat box deployments; ii) Investigate the suitability of current bat box designs for target species at the case study sites and iii) Trial new bat box designs.

Awarded: \$1,500.00

Recipient: SIMS, Ryan (University of New South Wales)

Project: Identifying alternate response models of critically endangered box gum grassy woodland following livestock exclusion.

Synopsis: Before European settlement box gum grassy woodland once covered more than five million hectares of land from southern Queensland to Victoria. Since European settlement the community has been exploited by farming practices, and today less than 10% remains in good condition. For this reason, box gum grassy woodland is listed critically endangered under Commonwealth and state legislation. This research aims to increase success and reduce costs associated with woodland rehabilitation. It will inform efficient and effective site selection and design of management strategies by identifying the types of sites associated with the lowest risks of regeneration failure by diagnosing potential ecological barriers causing slow woodland regeneration or regrowth with undesirable trajectories. Ultimately, the outcomes would also serve to guide government policy on offset management and conservation of box gum grassy woodland. The study will make an important contribution to understanding regeneration ecology of a critically endangered community at the subject of so many restoration projects. The aim of this study is to: 1. Identify alternate response models of grassy box woodland and derived grassland following the exclusion of livestock grazing over a twenty year time frame; 2. Assess whether trajectories are progressing towards desired states (reference sites); and 3. Describe site conditions that mediate different response pathways.

Awarded: \$500.00

Recipient: WARREN, Connie (Deakin University)

Project: Conserving biodiversity in agricultural landscapes: the role of land-use.

Synopsis: Despite their heavily modified state, Australia's agricultural landscapes are home to a diverse range of native species. Many of these species persist in small remnant patches embedded within farmland. In addition, some species, such as open-country birds, satisfy some or all of their habitat requirements within agricultural fields themselves. However, little is known about how the context of surrounding agricultural land uses affects the conservation value of remnants embedded in agricultural landscapes, or how the spatial composition and configuration of agricultural land uses affects species that utilise farmland. Addressing these knowledge gaps is critically important, particularly in areas dominated by agriculture that have experienced significant loss in native vegetation cover. The northern region of the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority is a key example of a heavy modified agricultural landscape. This project will assess the biodiversity value of these remnant patches in the context of surrounding farming practices for three taxonomic groups – birds, bats and bees. In addition, the project will assess how birds that satisfy some or all of their habitat requirements within agricultural fields are affected by the spatial composition and configuration of agricultural land uses.

Awarded: \$500.00

2014 Awards

Recipient: BARRY, Dr Katherine L (Macquarie University)

Project: Cryptic male choice in a sexually cannibalistic praying mantis.

Synopsis: Praying mantids are a suitable group of insects to further investigate the potential for strategic ejaculation because there is evidence that females mate multiple times in the wild. In the praying mantid, the female is known to mate many times. Males are known to be able to adjust their ejaculate if in competition with other males in an attempt to gain an advantage. Female quality is known to be significant, i.e. do males adjust ejaculate according to the condition of the female, i.e. ejaculate more sperm if the female is in good condition with a larger number of eggs. In this proposed study, we will use the false garden mantid *Pseudomantis albofimbriata* to investigate the effect of sperm competition risk via female quality on male ejaculatory expenditure. Mating experiments with

well-fed and not so well fed females will be followed to assess the number of sperm in the ejaculate and number and condition of the offspring.

Awarded: \$1,400.00

Recipient: BOAST, Dr Alexander P (University of Adelaide)

Project: Ancient DNA and coprolite analysis of the kakapo *Strigops habroptilus*.

Synopsis: The once widespread kakapo of New Zealand is now reduced to a few small populations, but there are abundant skins, skeletal material and coprolites in collections. This project, using ancient DNA, will focus on the coprolites to investigate genetic diversity, diet and the parasite community over the last 3,000 years.

Awarded: \$1,200.00

Recipient: BOISSEAU, Romain, P.G.E (University of Sydney)

Project: Investigating the mechanism through which cannibalised males inhibit female remating in the Australian redback spider, *Latrodectos hasselti*.

Synopsis: Some traits are costly, in terms of Darwinian “struggle for survival” but favourable for reproductive success. Cannibalism of the male must be an extreme example. In the redback spider, *Latrodectus hasselti*, the male “somersaults” to a position that facilitates being eaten during copulation. This allows longer copulation and somehow reduces subsequent female receptivity, thus reducing sperm completion. Other cannibalistic spiders also show this reduced receptivity, but little is known about it. Experiments with mating trials will investigate the nature and mechanism of this reduced receptivity.

Awarded: \$600.00

Recipient: BOND, Peter (University of Queensland)

Project: Marine debris ruins inshore environments

Synopsis: Project: Marine debris ruins inshore environments

Pollution of plastic items has a widespread detrimental environmental impact. The broken-down fragments are of particular concern because they can be ingested by marine life. Further breakdown in the gut may release toxic substances. Fish, concentrating on the hardyhead will be sampled from inshore environments off North Stradbroke Island. Growth parameters, reproduction, diets and habitat will be assessed, as little is known of these factors for most species. Contents of the gut will be analysed to see what they have been eating. Samples of intestines will be analysed for the presence of mercury and arsenic. Polluted and pristine environments will be compared. Reproductive organs will also be inspected to evaluate the effects of exposure to marine debris. This work will be crucial for fisheries management. Hardyheads are used for bait and are an important part of the diet of commercial fish species. The results will be communicated to the North Stradbroke communities.

Awarded: \$1,400.00

Recipient: FABRICANT, Dr Scott (Macquarie University) (John Noble award for Invertebrate Research)

Project: Evolution of colour change and thermoregulation in *Kosciuscola* grasshoppers.

Synopsis: The chameleon grasshopper (*Kosciuscola tristis*) of the Australian Alps, including Tasmania, is unique among the acridid grasshoppers: it changes colour with temperature. It is black when cold and bright turquoise when hot. Thinner patches of cuticle (Slifer’s patches) and colour granules that can be rearranged according to temperature are features of the cuticle that can assist in thermoregulation in grasshoppers. Only the males show this change, but males and females have the same intracellular structure. There are four species in the genus, arranged according to altitude. Only *K. tristis* shows this colour change. This project will use electron microscopy images of the cuticle and epidermal cells of all for species to determine how the structure relates to thermoregulation.

Awarded: \$1,400.00

Recipient: GEARY, William L (Deakin University)

Project: Fire and the drivers of predator interactions in a semi-arid mallee environment.

Synopsis: Fire drives habitat succession and is an important agent of ecosystem structure and function. The predator guild is also an important agent. Top predators (dogs/dingos) suppress smaller predators (foxes, cats) and large herbivores (kangaroos). In the absence of the large predators, the native fauna is known to suffer because of the prevalence of foxes. Some predators take advantage of a post fire landscape and increase prey consumption along the burnt/unburnt ecotone. These complex relationships will be investigated in the Victorian mallee region using four survey methods: camera trapping, scat surveys, track surveys and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to obtain a more accurate assessment of the community dynamics. The use of UAVs has the potential to revolutionise landscape ecology.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: LEVIN, Rachel (University of New South Wales)

Project: Comparative transcriptomics and genetic engineering of *Symbiodinium* as a strategy to reduce coral bleaching due to Anthropogenic warming.

Synopsis: Rising sea surface temperatures due to anthropogenic climate change induces expulsion of the endosymbiotic *Symbiodinium*, leading to coral bleaching. Coral bleaching threatens the survival of coral reefs worldwide, and the frequency and duration of bleaching events is escalating. The first part of this project plans to identify the genes responsible for the heat stress response of *Symbiodinium* through comparative transcriptomic experiments at ambient and elevated temperatures with two *Symbiodinium* clade C1 strains known to have different thermal tolerances. The results of these experiments will contribute to our understanding of the gene networks underlying the heat stress response in *Symbiodinium* and are expected to highlight candidate genes for the second part of this project, genetic engineering of *Symbiodinium*.

Awarded: \$ 1,800.00

Recipient: O'HANLON, Dr James (Macquarie University)

Project: Chemical basis of ant attraction and its function as an egg dispersal strategy in Phasmatodea.

Synopsis: Chemical basis of ant attraction in and its function as an egg dispersal strategy in the Phasmatodea.

Synopsis: Australia is a global hotspot for a biological phenomenon known as myrmecochory – a mutualistic adaptation where plants rely on foraging ants to disperse their seeds. Some plant seeds have a fleshy, food reward appendage (elaiosome) that attracts ants that then transport them to their nests, hence effecting dispersal. Certain stick and leaf insects (Phasmatodea) use a convergent dispersal strategy for their eggs. A fleshy appendage on the eggs of some stick insects, termed “capitulum”, functions analogously to the plant seed elaiosome. Five major chemical components of the ant attractant have been identified. Experiments will be done to determine which one(s) attract ants. These experiments have been done on plant seeds and the results will be compared with those from plants to determine if phasmids use the same chemicals or if they have evolved different attractants. Phasmids already resemble plants (sticks). Could this be another example of convergent evolution?

Awarded: \$650.00

Recipient: ROBERTS, Georgina (Latrobe University)

Project: Long-term adaptability of *Vombatus ursinus* (common wombat) in south-western Tasmania – an investigation using stable isotopic analysis in the archaeological record.

Synopsis: Project: Long-term adaptability of *Vombatus ursinus* (common wombat) in south-western Tasmania – an investigation using stable isotope analysis in the archaeological record.

Bone collection from caves range in age from ~ 35,000 BP to ~ 11,000 BP. Wombats made up about 30% of the diet of the Aborigines (Bennetts wallaby made up 70%). Stable isotope analysis of tooth enamel uses the ratio of stable oxygen to stable carbon isotopes that can be related to the

environment where the enamel was formed. Sequential analysis can reveal events within the lifetime of the individual (seasonal patterns, migration, weaning events), based on known growth rates of the teeth. Wombats have rootless teeth that grow continuously, allowing preservation of a high-resolution record of the stable isotopes. This project will use high-resolution sequential analysis to derive local climate in the last two years of the individual's life and hence climatic change from ~ 35,000 BP to ~ 11,000 BP (through the last glacial period). The stable isotopes can also indicate changes in diet and hence changes in the vegetation.

Awarded: \$2,400.00

Recipient: SOLEY, Dr Fernando (Macquarie University)

Project: Predator-prey interactions between an araneophagic assassin bug (*Stenolemus giraffa*; Hemiptera: Reduviidae) and a theridiid spider (*Parasteatoda* sp.).

Synopsis: The aim of this project is to characterize the interactions between *Stenolemus giraffa* and *Parasteatoda* sp., in order to better understand how differences between spider prey can shape the strategies used by araneophagic predators. The best known predators of spiders are other spiders. Some even prey on spiders in webs. Some assassin bugs also prey on web-building spiders. How do they do it? Some produce vibrations that mimic prey caught in the web to lure the spider to the edge of the web and some use stealth to catch the spider. The spider species differ in their response to web invasion and some even counter attack. Reports of experiments done with different assassin bugs and different spider species are not comparable. It is thought that the nature of the web influences strategies, e.g. assassin bugs lure spiders with dense webs out to the edge. Further observations will be carried out in the field (East Kimberley region).

Awarded: \$750.00

2013 Awards

Recipient: Armbrecht, Linda H (Macquarie University)

Project: Phytoplankton characterization and related biogeochemical processes in a biological hotspot: Solitary Island Marine Park, Eastern Australia.

Synopsis: In the light of climate change, the global subtropical western boundary currents are experiencing an above-average sea surface temperature warming. The East Australian current, which transports warm tropical water masses to temperate latitudes, is one of these currents. As the physical parameters of the East Australian current have changed over the past 60 years, changes are expected for the inhabitants of the currents, the free-floating phytoplankton. This research will provide the first detailed taxonomic phytoplankton survey in the Solitary Island Marine Park region, an area that is regarded as a hotspot for climate change. By sampling throughout a complete annual cycle, covering various oceanographic regimes, and along an elaborated sampling design, temporal and regional small-scale variations in phytoplankton distribution will be determined. This dataset will comprise the first comparison to the Port Hacking Station (Sydney) and in addition, reveal further information about phytoplankton microhabitats and carbon, nitrogen and silica uptake and export, which cannot be determined from depth-integrated net sampling.

Awarded: \$450.00

Note: *The above recipient has also received an award from the William Macleay Microbiology Scientific Research Fund.*

Recipient: Bass, Nathan (Macquarie University)

Project: Social preferences and individual recognition in adult Port Jackson sharks.

Synopsis: This project primarily aims to investigate the demographic and behavioural traits underpinning the social structure of Port Jackson shark aggregations, such as sex, size/age, relatedness

and familiarity. Specifically, we hypothesise that the social preferences of Port Jackson sharks will be influenced by size and familiarity, but not by sex or genetic relatedness. This project also aims to identify the cues that adult Port Jackson sharks use for the recognition of individual conspecifics. Specifically, we **hypothesise** that Port Jackson sharks are capable of individual recognition and that this individual recognition is achieved through chemical and visual cues.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: Giles, Jenny (University of Queensland)

Project: Increased representation of rare tropical Australian chondrichthyan fauna in shark fin identification methods

Synopsis: The reliable identification of severed shark fins at any point in harvest or trade depends on the comprehensive representation of possible species in the reference material, and is of particular importance in forensic casework. While the harvest and trade of shark fins is becoming increasingly regulated in Australia and globally, the difficulty of identifying which fins come from which species when encountered at any stage of processing remains a significant hurdle to enforcing these laws. In fisheries scenarios where seized fins are intact with the skin on, image-based field guides can potentially be used to detect prohibited fins by allowing a non-expert to match a fin shape to an image. However, determining that a fin truly does not belong to another species in a legal case would rely on further verification.

Awarded: \$1,200.00

Recipient: Marcus, Lara (University of Tasmania)

Project: Environment and biological factors driving whale shark occurrence and abundance at the Ningaloo Reef, Western Australia.

Synopsis: Conservation of important iconic marine species such as sharks is a high priority in Australian waters. The world's largest fish, the whale shark, is also one of the least-known shark species. It aggregates seasonally in certain coastal waters throughout the world's tropical and temperate seas including the Ningaloo Reef (Western Australia). Very limited data exists on the reasons for whale shark aggregations, however it is believed that whale shark movements are associated to water conditions and to peaks in preferred prey abundance.

Awarded: \$500.00

Recipient: Mason, Robert Alan Burton (University of Queensland)

Project: Does ocean acidification enhance coral bleaching, and if so, why?

Synopsis: Coral bleaching is the expulsion of symbiotic dinoflagellate algae by their hosting coral animals, and is a process that is occurring with increasing frequency and severity due to climate change. Coral bleaching is triggered by higher than average sea temperatures combined with high light levels. Recent evidence suggests that ocean acidification will exacerbate coral bleaching caused by temperature stress. However, this evidence is controversial amongst most reef scientists and will remain so until further evidence and a mechanistic explanation are put forward. This proposed project aims to clarify whether ocean acidification does indeed enhance coral bleaching, and if so, to identify probable mechanisms by which this effect occurs.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: McElroy, David J (University of Sydney)

Project: Determining direct and indirect effects of a contaminant-based disturbance on succession ecology using marine biofilms and invertebrates as a model system.

Synopsis: Terrestrial run-off has led to an increase in the concentration of contaminants in coastal waters. Species exhibit differential tolerances to heavy metal contaminants such as copper. This disparity exerts selection pressure on intolerant species and may lead to the restructuring of communities. Thus, predicting the consequences of disturbance scenarios for the way an ecosystem

functions is increasingly important for understanding the processes that govern the way nature responds to change.

Awarded: \$1,500.00

Recipient: Munroe, Samantha E M (James Cook University)

Project: Migratory and dietary patterns of *Rhizoprionodon taylori* in coastal environments using stable isotope analysis.

Synopsis: As high trophic level consumers, sharks are crucial maintainers of ecosystem structure and function. To understand the effect sharks have on marine ecosystems, it is important to quantify relationships with their environment, specifically resource use and diet. Similarly, this data is required to understand how environmental or anthropogenic changes will affect the sustainability of species. Shark behaviour, in particular the degree of specialization expressed, can have a large impact on species vulnerability to anthropogenic pressures. This project aims to address these knowledge gaps and define the diet and habitat specialization of a poorly understood, highly abundant species, the Australian sharpnose shark, *Rhizoprionodon taylori*, in multiple inshore bays using stable isotope analysis.

Awarded: \$750.00

Recipient: O'Dwyer, Katie (Otago University) (John Noble award for Invertebrate Research)

Project: Matching host-parasite biogeographical patterns: a comparative study of marine snails and their trematode parasites.

Synopsis: Biogeographical patterns provide a window into the processes shaping species distribution across a wide range of scales. Such patterns have been relatively well documented throughout Australasia, in particular for coastal marine organisms. However, past research has focused exclusively on free-living plants and animals, and not on the biogeographical patterns of their parasites and diseases. The factors shaping the distribution of parasites are not necessarily the same as those acting on their hosts; we need to understand the dispersal forces acting on the former if we are to manage and conserve the latter. This project will investigate the distribution of parasites in a common group of marine snails occurring across several known biogeographical zones in Australian coastal areas.

Awarded: \$1,400.00

Recipient: Pearson, Sarah K (Flinders University)

Project: Using molecular methods to investigate parasites within a social host (gidgee skink).

Synopsis: This project aims to use molecular methods to detect parasites within gidgee skinks (*Egernia stokesii*). The project objectives are to 1) determine the absence/presence of parasites (*Plasmodium*, *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, *Hemolivia*, and nematodes) within gidgee skink blood samples, and 2) where parasites are present, measure the degree of parasite infection. Disease is an increasing conservation concern. Sociality adds complexity to disease dynamics, where living in a group may increase the spread of parasites through a population. Genetic diversity acts as a buffer to disease; diversity of immune genes may be a means of host defence against novel parasites.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: Sanger, Jennifer C (University of Tasmania)

Project: Epiphyte diversity over varying spatial scales in three climatic zones in eastern Australia.

Synopsis: Epiphytes, plants which grow on other plants for support, are a highly diverse group, representing up to 10% of the world's vascular plant diversity. In Australia, there are c. 380 vascular epiphyte species, with the vast majority confined to a very small proportion of the continent: the humid tropical regions in the north-east. Non-vascular epiphytes, such as bryophytes (the group consisting of mosses, liverworts and hornworts), are also highly abundant and diverse in Australia's humid tropical region, as well as in the temperate rainforests of southern Australia. Epiphytes, having no direct contact with the ground, rely on regular moisture inputs from fog and rainfall. Therefore,

they are highly sensitive to relatively small changes in precipitation and will be greatly affected by climate change. *Asplenium nidus*, the most common epiphyte in the tropical areas of north-eastern Australia, has high rates of mortality during long dry periods. Such periods are likely to increase in frequency and intensity under climate change. This project will examine the variation in epiphyte diversity across different scales, ranging from micro-habitats through to landscape scale.

Awarded: \$1,750.00

Recipient: Sowersby, William G (Monash University)

Project: The role of personality and polymorphisms in maintaining population variation.

Synopsis: Understanding the mechanisms that maintain variation in traits under natural selection within animal populations is a major challenge for evolutionary theory. Genetically determined colour polymorphisms, which occur when multiple, discrete colour forms are found within an interbreeding population, are a readily visible example of variation. Two hundred red devil cichlids will be collected from Hazelwood Pondage, Latrobe Valley, Victoria, and transported to aquarium facilities at Monash University, Clayton. Laboratory based behavioural experiments will determine where each individual sits along major personality axes.

Awarded: \$500.00

Recipient: Umbers, Kate (Macquarie University)

Project: Warning colouration and startle display in a colourful katydid.

Synopsis: Many species flash bright colours to deter potential predators by performing a warning startle display. Startle displays are intriguing because the animal must choose to reveal their bright colours or not, depending on their perceived threat. *Acripeza reticulata* is a large (up to 4 gr) katydid (Orthoptera: Tettigoniidae) found predominantly in the Australian Alps that performs an impressive red and blue startle display when disturbed. This project will quantify the behaviour and colour of the startle display of *Acripeza reticulata*.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: Vogel, Sandra (University of New South Wales)

Project: Making healthy chicks: the MHC as an immunogenetic marker to augment population genetic studies of Little Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*).

Synopsis: Little Penguins (*Eudyptula minor*) are iconic sea birds native to Australia. Population declines have been reported at numerous locations including Manly in Sydney Harbour. Here, the only known remaining mainland colony of penguins in NSW has been listed as an endangered population under the Threatened Species Conservation Act, and areas of North Harbour have been declared “critical habitat” for the population. Declines in penguin numbers have mainly been attributed to human impacts such as urbanization, introduction of feral predators and climate change. In the second half of 2012, a total of 300 genetic samples have been collected from eight different Little Penguin populations in NSW. By sequencing the Major Histocompatibility Complex (MHC) in adults and chicks, we will be able to verify whether individual Little Penguins show preference for mating with partners carrying different MHC variants to themselves.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

2012 Awards

Recipient: Ajani, Penelope (Macquarie University)

Project: Microalgal biodiversity in the coastal waters of New South Wales, Australia.

Synopsis: Nearly half of the world’s oxygen and approximately 40% of photosynthesis is carried out by phytoplankton. There is an imperative to understand the changes that a warmer world will

have on phytoplankton ecology, however Australia boasts few phytoplankton ecologists and fewer taxonomists. Species belonging to the cosmopolitan *Pseudo-nitzschia*, have been implicated in biotoxic episodes in NSW oyster-growing estuaries, although the toxicity and taxonomy of individual taxa remains unclear.

Awarded: \$1,000.00

Recipient: Katherine L Barry (Macquarie University)

Project: Extreme reproductive conflict: sexual cannibalism, female deception, and the evolution of male mate choice

Synopsis: The primary aims of this project are to investigate female-imposed sexual conflict and its effect on male mating strategies. It will address the intersection of two of the most enigmatic phenomena in the evolution of reproductive strategies: sexual cannibalism and male mate choice. Sexual cannibalism represents an extreme manifestation of sexual conflict in polygynous systems, and male mate choice in systems without paternal care continues to challenge our understanding of gender roles within the framework of sexual selection.

Awarded: \$1,400.00

Recipient: Déaux, Eloïse C (Macquarie University)

Project: Quantifying the form and function of dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*) vocalizations

Synopsis: The Canidae family includes 36 species of wild dogs. Representatives of this family are found on all continents except for Antarctica. Species occur in most environments such as the Arctic fox in arctic regions, the New Guinea singing dog occupying tropical forest areas and the African wild dog occurring in arid regions of Africa. The central question of this research is to determine if dingo vocal communication is really restricted to three vocal classes. It is thought that dingoes are a social canid species, have large sized groups and seem to display a vertical hierarchy within their pack. We also aim to provide the first quantitative description of this species' vocal system.

Awarded: \$700.00

Recipient: Delgado-Vélez, Carlos (University of Wollongong)

Project: Spatial dynamics of bird-parasite interactions along a gradient of urbanization.

Synopsis: Integrating ecological and physiological approaches, my PhD project seeks to analyse the distribution of ectoparasites, haemosporidians and other endoparasites along an urbanization gradient in New South Wales, Australia, and explore the potential role of parasites and immune status in determining urban-bird communities. My PhD will investigate the spatial dynamics of bird-parasite interactions in the Illawarra and Sydney regions to determine the relationship between infestation loads, host traits, health and body condition in order to determine how parasites affect bird communities along a gradient of urbanization.

Awarded: \$700.00

Recipient: Dennison, Siobhan (Macquarie University)

Project: Mating system, group structure and inbreed avoidance in a social lizard: The Great Desert skink (*Liopholis kintorei*)

Synopsis: The Great Desert skink (*Liopholis kintorei*), an icon of the Australian outback, is unique among all reptiles because it cooperatively constructs and maintains extensive burrow systems in which close kin live. This is a level of reptilian cooperation and parental care unknown anywhere else in the world, and yet little is known about the population and group dynamics within this social species. The aim of this project is to: a.) Characterize the mating system and group structure of *Liopholis kintorei* and b.) Examine potential inbreeding avoidance mechanisms.

Awarded: \$1,400.00

Recipient: Fabricant, Scott A (Macquarie University)

Project: Predator perception as a source of population divergence in colour patterns of the aposematic Hibiscus Harlequin Bg (*Tectocoris diopthalmus*).

Synopsis: It is hypothesized that aposematic warning colours are maintained in a species by frequency-based stabilizing selection. This should lead to a uniform aposematic pattern between individuals maximizing individual and group fitness. However, the reality is that natural populations often show high degrees of colour variation between individuals and between populations. To our primate eyes, the Harlequin Bug's bright iridescent blue and vibrant orange colouring appears quite conspicuous against its green leaf background. However, the efficacy of an aposematic signal is entirely dependent on the receiver physiology and perceptive ability of the predator.

Awarded: \$1,100.00

Recipient: Kohli, Gurjeet S (University of NSW)

Project: Diversity and distribution of the genus *Gambierdiscus* (Dinoflagellata) in New South Wales, Australia.

Synopsis: The genus *Gambierdiscus* Adachi et Fukuyo (Gonyaulacales, Dinoflagellata, Alveolata) is one of approximately 2500 species of this group (Dinoflagellata) of marine protists. Species of *Gambierdiscus* are considered to be epibenthic, and are generally found attached to seagrass, macroalgae, sand and coral rubble, however they can also occur in the plankton. *Gambierdiscus* is one of a number of genera of benthic dinoflagellates that produce toxic polyketide compounds, including polyether ladder compounds, macrolides and alkaloids. These toxins can accumulate in the flesh of small invertebrates and filter feeding organisms, and again in those higher in the food chain, and then affect fish, marine mammals, birds and humans. Ciguatoxins (CTX) and Maitotoxins (MTX) are polyether polyketide compounds and are the causative agent of the Ciguatera Fish Poisoning (CFT). Ciguatera Fish Poisoning (CFT) is the most common seafood-related toxin disease worldwide, with an estimated 50,000 to 500,000 cases per year, mainly occurring in tropical countries. The main aim of this study is to conduct a sampling trip along the coast of New South Wales and collect samples from several different sites to identify any species of *Gambierdiscus* present in this water.

Awarded: \$500.00

Recipient: Letten, Andrew D (University of NSW)

Project: How does fine-scale climate variability influence patterns of plant community diversity?

Synopsis: In addition to predicted shifts in mean temperature and precipitation, anthropogenic climate change is expected to result in increased intra-annual climate variability and lead to a greater frequency of extreme weather events. Despite widespread awareness of these related yet distinct forecast scenarios, most studies at the interface of climate change and biodiversity science have focused solely on the ecological consequences of shifts in mean climate variables, rather than elevated variability around the mean. In collaboration with my PhD supervisor at UNSW, Professor David Keith, and additional supervisors from the Australian Museum and the University of Technology Sydney, I propose to conduct innovative research to explore the influence of climate variability on patterns of functional, phylogenetic and species diversity in temperate plant communities of Wollemi National Park and Yengo National Park (NSW).

Awarded: \$1,200.00

Recipient: McCurry, Matthew R (Monash University)

Project: Morphological convergence in tooth morphology during terrestrial-marine transitions.

Synopsis: Transitions in habitat from a terrestrial to a marine environment have occurred a number of times throughout evolutionary history. Convergence in dental morphology has been described qualitatively across a wide range of marine species, with conical tooth morphologies being particularly common in marine tetrapods. This study will aim to examine the morphology of teeth within groups that have undergone transitions to a marine environment. The functionality of different dental morphologies will also be examined in order to gain an understanding of how evolution shapes

biological structure as a result of different physical and ecological conditions. Potential groups to include within this study include crocodylians, pinnipeds, delphinids, whales, varanids and mosasaurs, ichthyosaurs sauropterygians.

Awarded: \$500.00

Recipient: Prychid, Chrissie (University of New England)

Project: Floral development in the Roundhead Bristle Rush *Chorizandra sphaerocephala* R. Br. (Cyperaceae, Mapanioidea), a beautiful native Australian sedge.

Synopsis: Flowering plants are one of the most successfully diverse groups of organisms on the planet. They are critical to life and yet flowers generally possess just four distinct floral organ types, conservatively arranged in a specific order: female organ/s, surrounded by male organs, surrounded by an inner whorl of petaloid/perianth structures, surrounded by an outer whorl of petaloid/perianth structures. We aim, for the first time, to obtain a complete ontogenetic data series on the development of the floral structures in the Roundhead Bristle Rush (Cyperaceae, Mapanioidea), a member of the uniquely different Mapanioidea, one of the two subfamilies of the sedges, a large but relatively understudied monocot plant family, with the goal of deciphering the morphological character homology of the reproductive structures.

Awarded: \$1,500.00

Recipient: Rendon-Castaneda, Dalila A (CSIRO)

Project: Predator/prey interactions between the wolf spider *Tasmanicosa leukartii* (Araneae: Lycosidae) and different life stages of the cotton bollworm *Helicoverpa armigera* (Lepidoptera: Noctuidae). **Synopsis:** Genetically modified cotton (Bt cotton) containing a gene from the bacteria *Bacillus thuringiensis* cotton was introduced to Australia in 1996 to control one of its main pests, the larvae of *Helicoverpa* moths. However, genes present in field populations of *Helicoverpa armigera* have the potential to confer high levels of resistance to BT toxins. Within ground spiders, wolf spiders (family Lycosidae) are the most abundant, making up over 60% of ground spider community in Australian cotton agroecosystems. The predator-prey interactions between wolf spiders and the different life stages of *Helicoverpa* are poorly understood. The aim of this study is to describe the predator-prey interactions between the wolf spider *Tasmanicosa leukartii* (Araneae: Lycosidae) and different life stages (late instar larva, pupa, recently emerged adult) of *Helicoverpa armigera* in controlled enclosures.

Awarded: \$700.00

Recipient: Smith, Helen M (University of Sydney)

Project: Replacing natives with exotics: wildlife responses to black rat invasion in the Sydney Harbour National Park.

Synopsis: The invasion of non-native species into foreign ecosystems is one of the biggest challenges for conservation and restoration biologists. The Black Rat *Rattus rattus* is a major threat to global and local biodiversity and is particularly devastating on islands where endemic fauna and flora have not evolved defence mechanisms. The project aims to examine the impacts of Black Rats on native fauna and flora, and the ecological changes that occur following the return of the native Bush Rat.

Awarded: \$800.00

Recipient: Danswell Starrs (Australian National University)

Project: Thieves in the night: does nocturnal egg predation exert early mortality in nest-guarding fish? **Synopsis:** Given the very high levels of mortality during the early life history of fishes, any shifts in processes at this stage can have critical impacts on the replenishment and sustainability of populations. A study on smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*) in the USA found that males guarding nests enjoy low nest predation by invasive round gobies (*Neogobius melanostomus*), which otherwise consume all eggs within 15 minutes if the guarding male is absent. The aims of this research

project is to determine if Oriental weatherloach are egg predators and whether nest-guarding Purple spotted gudgeons can defend their eggs from this invasive species.

Awarded: \$700.00