

Rice Memorial Fund 2010

The Rice Memorial Fund was established by donations following the death of Barbara Rice in 2009. It honours her memory by encouraging field research. Distributions from the fund support two prizes.

The first offering of the Rice Memorial Field Research Award was won by Rachael Gallagher on the basis of her seminar at the annual postgrad conference in November 2010. Rachel is working on climbing plants (vines, lianes, scramblers) within the littoral rainforest that occurs in small fragments up and down the NSW coast. Climbers are parasites for height, and for the light that comes with height. Rachel had previously shown that compared to self-supporting plants, climbers tend to have leaves that are more cheaply constructed and are discarded and replaced more quickly. Her 2010 seminar used a recently-developed method called Trait Gradient Analysis (which I won't try to describe here) to dissect in more detail how the trait-mixture at a site is assembled and whether assembly works differently among the climbers compared to among the trees.



Rachel Gallagher at Iluka field site

The 2010 Rice Memorial Field Research Proposal Award was won by Sabine Nooten on the basis of her proposal towards field research during 2011. Sabine is working on the impacts of future climate change on insect herbivore communities. Insects on plants account for well over half of the world's total diversity of species, and this is because many insect species are specialized to living and feeding on only one or a few host plant species. During the first years of her PhD Sabine has been characterizing the insect faunas at Sydney latitude on nine native plant species within the three important families Myrtaceae, Fabaceae and Proteaceae. The proposal for 2011 is



Curculionid on Leptospermum (Sabine Nooten)



Curculionid on Eucalyptus (Sabine Nooten)

to establish transplant gardens of these same plant species about 600 km closer to the equator. This is about 3°C warmer than the present range of the plant species and is in the mid-range of climate projections for Sydney by the second half of this century. So what sort of insect community will form on the plants in this warmer climate? Will the same insect species as in Sydney colonize the plants, regardless of the changed climate, or will the assemblage be impoverished? How many colonizers of the transplants will be insects currently occurring in the warmer climate but on different (perhaps related) plant species?

Rachel and Sabine are PhD students in the labs of Michelle Leishman and Lesley Hughes, both of whom previously had worked with Barbara Rice 20-25 years earlier while they were themselves PhD students in the Macquarie ecology group. So it's a nice touch that both the winners in this first year of the awards were in a straight line of academic descent from Barb.

Rice Memorial Poster Session, Dec 2010 in Canberra

The poster session at the annual meeting of Ecological Society of Australia was supported in Barbara Rice's name (though not, strictly speaking, through the Rice Memorial Fund). The system is that when you have an intelligent conversation with a poster-giver they will give you a sticker, and then you can trade stickers for drinks. So the idea was to buy drinks for Australian ecologists in Barb's memory, provided they paid attention to the posters.

photos courtesy Wendy Neilan and Ecol Soc Aust

