

Spring 2022

### Moore selected Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professorship by UGA

**Dr. Patricia Moore** has been selected by the University of Georgia as a Meigs Distinguished Teaching Professor. This honor is the university's highest recognition for excellence in instruction.

"Meigs Professors are an elite group of faculty members at an institution that places a great value on outstanding instruction," said S. Jack Hu, the university's senior vice president for academic affairs and provost.

Moore incorporates evidence-based teaching methods into her class-room and is dedicated to promoting student engagement and academic development. She is committed to providing experiential learning experiences through her mentorship of undergraduate research projects that produce tangible outcomes.

"The primary objective of higher education is to teach people to learn how to learn. Our students need the skills to adapt and develop along with a changing world if they are going to be successful in their careers," she said.

Moore views research and teaching as integrated activities. Her academic research often incorporates her undergraduates and graduate students. "I try to focus on the process by which we understand the natural world, helping students to develop the analytical and critical think-

ing skills necessary to evaluate new information and assess its quality. In my experience, moving to a student-centered learning

environment has gone a long way in nurturing student confidence in their own knowledge and abilities as critical thinkers," she said.

Moore has achieved an international reputation in the field of evolutionary biology with more than 60 peer-reviewed publications in top journals. She is a facilitator in the Department and Leadership Teams for Action (DeLTA) project. This project, funded by the National Science Foundation, involves over 100 faculty over five years to transform undergraduate STEM education at UGA. Through the DeLTA team, Moore is working with faculty to develop a cohesive and impactful student experience in introductory biology.

Moore is the recipient of the D.W. Brooks Excellence in Teaching Award. She is a National Academy of Education Fellow in the life sciences. She is also a Senior Teaching Fellow and Innovative Teaching Fellow in the UGA Center for Teaching and Learning.



Department of Entomology College of Agricultural & Environmental Sciences UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

#### From the desk of S. Kristine Braman ...

Our Entomology Department at University of Georgia is delighted to congratulate Drs. Moore, Batzer and Adang on their recent recognitions in teaching and research. We welcome Samantha Murphy to our front office as she works to support our faculty, students and graduate and undergraduate coordinators. It was wonderful to gather in person at the Georgia Entomological Society Meeting last



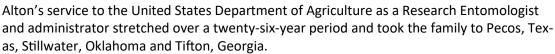


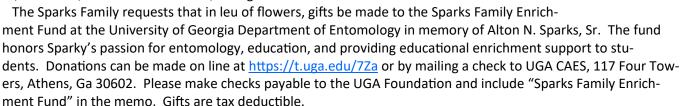
week on Jekyll Island after a two-year hiatus. A highlight for me was being

asked to give the Founders presentation honoring our retired Associate Dean, Dr. Beverly Sparks. "Dr. Sparks has led with grace and poise, gentility and a soft quiet voice but garnered great respect. Her understanding and appreciation of Extension programs and passion for edu-

cation had an impact on Georgia Cooperative Extension and the National Cooperative extension system which will be evident for years to come. "

We were saddened to learn that Dr. Alton (Sparky) Sparks has passed away at the age of 90.





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#### **BREAKING NEWS!!**

Jon Golan, undergraduate entomology student, was just awarded The Mid-Term Foundation Fellowship. This award is UGA's most prestigious undergraduate scholarship program. It provides a stipend that helps cover full annual cost of attendance



for two years plus grants for travel study and research and a variety of additional enrichment activities. Only 2-4 fellowships are awarded each year. Jon is a undergraduate researcher in Dr. Carmen Blubaugh's Lab where he is searching for predators of a new invasive crop pest, the Yellow Margined Leaf Beetle. **Congratulations Jon!** 

### **Vogel Lab Conducts Critical Kissing Bug Research**

A kiss has such romantic appeal, yet some kisses just end in heartbreak.

A smooth from the *Rhodnius prolixus*, or the blood-sucking "kissing bug," could be characterized more like the kiss of death — the insect is a primary vector for Chagas disease, a parasitic infection that kills



more than 10,000 people annually around the globe. According to the <u>U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</u>, victims with chronic cases of Chagas can suffer from lifethreatening heart or digestive malfunctions.

"Chagas disease is the single most neglected tropical disease in the Americas," said **Kevin Vogel**, assistant professor in the University of Georgia **Department of Entomology**, explaining why he was drawn to perform critically needed research on the insect.

"In fact, about three times the people die each year in the Americas from Chagas disease than all the other insect-borne diseases combined," he added. "Five to ten million people are infected with the parasite worldwide at any given time."

Considering the populations affected most, these numbers could be on the low side.

The insect is a carrier of the parasite *Trypanosoma* 

*cruzi*, which is spread through the feces of the insect, not the bite. However, evidence that a kissing bug has used someone for a meal is in the "hickey" type markings on the face of its victim or swelling around the eye.

The insect transfers the disease-causing parasite when the kissing bug finds a victim for a necessary blood meal, which usually happens through human or animal interaction during nighttime hours while the target host is sleeping in its nest or bed.

Besides humans, animals such as dogs and opossums suffer from the effects of the parasite transferred by a bite from the insect.

To learn more about the kissing bugs' ability to transmit the parasite, Vogel is focusing on how the insect's microbiome, or gut environment, influences the ability of the kissing bug to pass the parasite to its unsuspecting victims.

"If we really understand the biology of the kissing bug, then we may be able to see improved control strategies for the transmission of the parasite," said Vogel, who established his kissing bug colony in 2018. It is one of only a handful of thriving research colonies for the insect in the U. S.

One of Vogel's primary reasons for pursuing this direction of research is to hopefully turn the tide of the disease's progression.

"Since there are limited treatment options for those who contract Chagas disease, the primary way of controlling the disease is through reducing or eliminating the kissing bug vectors," he emphasized. Although kissing bugs are found in the Southern U.S., fortunately most species found in North America are not efficient at spreading disease. However, species in other parts of the world are of great concern in terms of disease transmission.

"For a variety of reasons, the U.S. species do not seem to be good vectors of Chagas. There are around 100 species of kissing bugs and only 25 to 30 are excellent disease vectors," Vogel said. Answering the question of why certain species are more effective vectors is part of what drives his research.

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences doctoral students Nia Keyes-Scott and Carissa Gilliland are both researching aspects of the insect's microbiome. Keyes-Scott's research focuses on how the microbiome may influence reproduction and metabolism — for example what factors influence the number of eggs produced by each insect. Gilliland is investigating how different bacteria influence the kissing bugs' development and how the host organism's immune system responds to those different bacteria.

(continue on page 4)

#### Faculty News

#### Vogel Lab from page 3

"Our overall goal is to establish a baseline understanding of what the microbes (bacteria) are doing. We know they are essential, but we would like to understand the unknown factors in the variations of bacteria in the gut of the kissing bug," Vogel said.



In <u>his lab</u> checking on the colony, Vogel further describes his personal and scientific perspective on studying the kissing bug.

"I just really like working with kissing bugs. They are one of the few model systems where we can easily control the microbiome and manipulate the insect for research purposes," he said.

With interest in Chagas disease growing worldwide, Vogel hopes to eventually expand his lab, accelerating his promising research. The more he understands the biology of the kissing bug, the more lives may be saved from this disease in the future.

"It is kind of ironic, really ... This insect gives a kiss that could literally break your heart," Keyes-Scott said of the insect at the core of her research efforts.

# Batzer named SWS Fellow

Dr. Darold Batzer was recently named a Fellow for the Society of Wetland Scientists (SWS). The Fellow Award is the highest recognition of membership bestowed by the society.

The mission of SWS is to promote understanding, conservation, protection, restoration, science-based management and sustainability of wetlands.



#### **Adang elected NAI Senior Member**

The National Academy of Inventors has elected Dr. Michael Adang to the 2022 class of senior members. NAI Senior Members are active faculty, scientists and administrators who have demonstrated remarkable innovation producing technologies that have brought real impact on the welfare of society. This latest class comes from 41 research universities and are named inventors on over 1093 issued U.S. patents.

#### **Student Shout Outs**

Congratulations to the following students:

Outstanding Teaching Assistants for Entomology — Gabriela Cardona-Rivera and Roy Kucuk

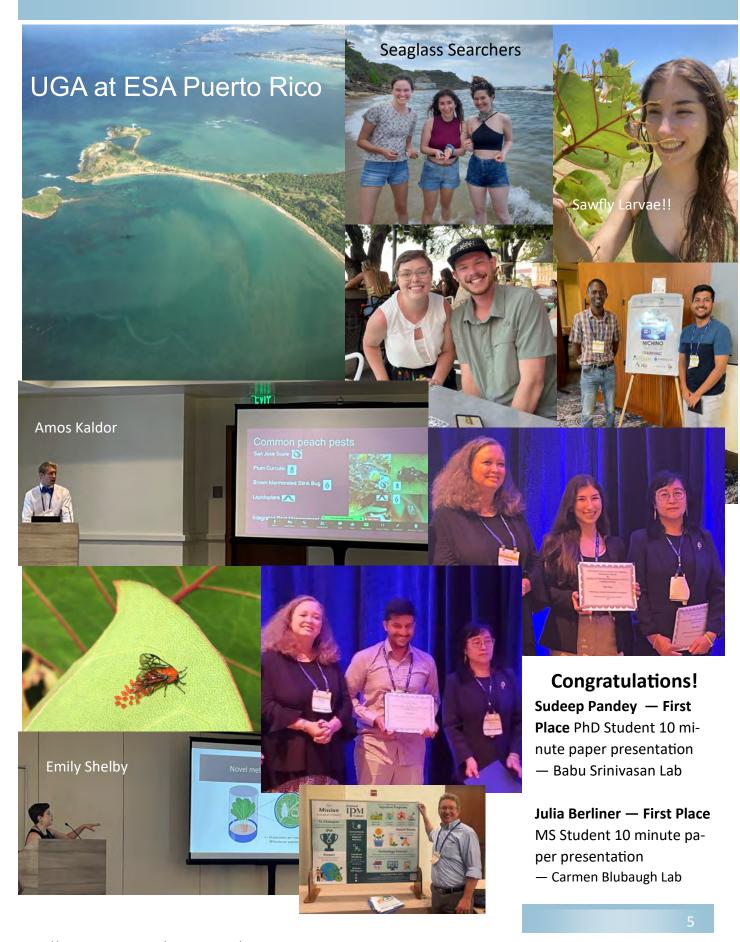
CAES Undergraduate Research Symposium — Taylor

Pearson — 1st place Oral

presentation B and 1st place

Oral presentation C

ESA Puerto Rico — Julia Berliner, 1st place MS Paper
Talk competition; Sudeep
Pandey, 1st place PhD student paper talk competition



#### MS Student Spotlight



### **Swikriti Pandey**

I am Swikriti Pandey, graduate student at Schmidt Biocontrol lab at UGA in Tifton. I joined the lab to work with Dr. Jason Schmidt in the Fall of 2019 and now I am almost at the end of my program. My work here is focused on understanding the role of arthropod-resistant tomato plants and biological control agents for the control of whiteflies.

I was born and raised in a small city in eastern Nepal. Nepal is predominantly an agricultural country so I was exposed to the culture of farming and growing produce since an early age. But, I was never aware that a career in the field of agriculture was a viable option. I always knew I wanted to be in the field of science specifically biology, so, I completed my high school studies as a biology major. Until that point, I was set on pursuing a career in medicine but I quickly realized, I had neither the interest or acumen for the field. I was then introduced to agriculture studies and decided to take my chances and

I am glad that everything has fallen into place ever since.

I knew I was in the right path when I got an opportunity to work in an organization that helped reinstate the victims of earthquake into their new homes. Most people affected by the disaster had their farms, which was the basis of their livelihood, uprooted. In addition to building homes, the organization was also providing the people with knowledge and materials on modern agriculture practices to start afresh. I worked on providing trainings on agriculture practices, facilitating when needed, connecting people to individuals that could help them and estimating what

was needed to help them restart their livelihoods. Seeing what I studied have an actual impact on people who needed it the most, made me get rid of any reservations I had.

I have always said, I am in entomology not because I particularly like insects, but because I love plants and I wanted to be in a field where I could explore my interest of saving and conserving them. Needless to say, I have no cool origin story about how I got introduced to insects and entomology as a field of study. It just fell into place as I was discovering my interests for plants, crop systems and integrated pest management systems in agriculture. I feel fortunate to be able to work in a field that caters to my interests and I am forever grateful to Dr. Schmidt for providing me this opportunity. Being in entomology and surrounded by people who are so passionate about what they do, I am awed every day by the scope of research this field has to offer. It did take me a little time and a couple of in-



sect courses, but the part about not being too keen on insects is also a part of me I don't recognize anymore.

In my free time, I love reading fiction of any kind really. I am always haunted by the fear of "there are too many books and not enough time to read". Food is a huge part of the culture where I am from so, I love trying new food. You will most definitely catch me watching movies or series in my free time.

Thanks to the Department of Entomology at UGA for letting me introduce myself here and thank you for reading along!

#### PhD Student Spotlight



### Carissa Gilliland

My name is Carissa Gilliland and I'm a fourth year PhD student in Kevin Vogel's lab. I am working on studying insect microbe interactions in kissing bugs. I'm particularly interested in researching how the microbiome impacts key aspects of insect physiology such as development and immune function.

I suppose I was always interested in insects since I was a kid. I used to love to watch ants on the sidewalk go about their ant business and I would catch and collect insects that got trapped in our pool. As I got older my interest in insects was less apparent, but I became extremely interested in science. I realized in high school during my AP biology course that I loved learning about all things biology and especially conducting experiments. During this class we went on a behind the scenes tour of the Field Museum in Chicago where I was able to tour a bunch of different research labs. I was particularly fascinated by all the insect collections at the museum. When I went to college, I already knew that I wanted to be a biological researcher. In my second year I began working in a moss taxonomy lab. While I didn't fall in love with bryophytes, I did fall in love with collecting data and work-

ing in a lab. During this time, I decided to take a general entomology course for one of my upper-level electives. I was fortunate enough that my very small liberal arts school had a resident entomologist and I learned how to collect and identify insects.

During the summer of my junior year in under grad I participated in an REU program at the University of Idaho. There I worked in a microbiology lab looking at the effects of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup, on soil dwelling bacteria. I learned so many valuable skills during that summer but the best might have been when my mentor suggested I look into the field of insect-microbe interactions. When I started digging into the literature, I was fascinated by all of the different microbial associations found in insects and the current research being done on this topic. I quickly concluded that this was something that I wanted to keep researching in the future. This interest in insect-microbe interactions quickly led me to the Entomology Department at UGA. I was immediately excited about the number of faculty that worked on some type of insect-microbe association. The work that Dr. Kevin Vogel was just starting with kissing bugs seemed particularly exciting to me. My current work is continuing to investigate the role of the microbiome in kissing bug biology. I'm particularly interested in learning more about how the microbiome impacts key aspects of host physiology like development and immune function.

I'm not in the lab, I love to knit and crochet and foster super cute kittens for a local rescue.



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Congratulations to Shannon Harris for being selected Best Graduate Student Poster at UGA Genetic's SE Population Ecology and Evolutionary Genetics conference. Shannon is a master's student in Allen Moore's lab.

## Great effort by UGA Team at ESA Puerto Rico



Members of the UGA Entomology Games Team are (left to right) undergraduate student Ashley Dombrowski, graduate student Julia Berliner, undergraduate student Lance Fountain and graduate student Rehan Arshad.

#### by Dr. Nancy Hinkle

The 2022 Southeastern Branch meeting of the Entomological Society of America was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, March 27-30. In the Entomology Games competition, the University of Georgia was represented by a team composed of Julia Berliner, Ashley Dombrowski, Rehan Arshad, and Lance Fountain.

The UGA team lost to Auburn in the semi-finals, but put a solid 60 points on the board. Considering

they were beaten by only one team, Auburn, which went on to be named the 2022 SEB Champions, the UGA team has considerable bragging rights!

The team members were all enthusiastic about the experience and glad they had the opportunity to participate this year. Despite the preparation time required for studying and practicing, they all eagerly look forward to competing in next year's Entomology Games.

#### **Calendar Reminders**

April 18-22 — LUND WEEK

April 26—CAES Student Awards and Leadership Banquet — GA Center—6-8pm

May 13 — UGA Commencement



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Happy Spring from UGA Entomology graduate students!