



From the Director

Hello all,

I hope everyone in RSB has a restful and happy Easter holiday – the weather in Canberra was just great for it.

The past month has been quite busy for us all, and I've taken multiple opportunities to talk with both academic and professional staff about where RSB is at now and potential areas for future development. Key topics included: (i) our current budget position, which is tight but manageable, (ii) the importance of proactive management of mental health and reasonably balanced workloads, and (iii) reflections on RSB's Research Plan, which was developed through extensive discussions over the past year. The latter was the focus of my seminar on March 18th, a recording of which is [here](#). The central message from all of this is that RSB continues to perform really well across research, teaching and training, we have great academic and professional staff and we have been able to develop and maintain world-class facilities. We will continue on this track so long as we keep a sharp strategic view on how we use our resources and maintain a positive, respectful and inclusive environment.

In the current newsletter, you can catch up on new arrivals and departures, new awards, grants, publications and outreach activities. The latter are important as RSB as a whole needs to do better at explaining the value of our research to the public and to attract students to our research-led teaching. RSB was well represented at the ANU Open Day with strong interest in what we offer from prospective students and parents (see Outreach section, below). My thanks to all staff and critters involved. Telling the story of our really cool research is something I'll be working on actively with you all over the coming months.

To get the ball rolling, we are asking PhD students to contribute short amateur video clips about their research by April 8th – and there are prizes available! See [here](#) for more detail. Have a go!

A reminder that a summary of outcomes from RSB Exec are provided at quarterly Faculty meetings and available to all via the RSB Intranet. The latest Q1 2024 report is [here](#). More generally, activities of the school are supported by a several formal Committees and User Groups, with agendas and minutes for meetings accessible via the intranet – [here](#).

Welcome



Welcome to **Kushini Kalupahana** (Langmore and Magrath Groups, E&E). Kushini studied Environmental Science at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, and her honours project was on the effects of aquatic and roosting birds on water quality. Her PhD will investigate sex differences in song and mimicry in brown thornbills.

Welcome to **Yuxin Hou** (Langmore Group, E&E). Yuxin recently completed a Masters at the University of Copenhagen, where she studied the population genetics of Grant's gazelle. For her PhD, she will study how the interactions between cuckoos and their hosts drive speciation in cuckoos.



Welcome to **Billy Bray** (Langmore Group, E&E). Billy recently completed a Masters at University College London, where he studied the interactions between urban badgers and foxes. He will study loss of song culture and conservation of the critically endangered regent honeyeater for his PhD.



Welcome to **Karim Bolis** (Pogson Group, PS), who is starting their new role as a Technical Officer in APPF. Karim will support the plant transformation work of Australia's Economic Accelerator SEED project.



Welcome to **Morgan Bockwinkel** (Way Group, PS), who is starting as a project officer in APPF. Morgan will oversee the Procurement of research infrastructure and provide Project Management.

Welcome to **Elizabeth McLennan** (DSTO, E&E) who will be replacing Ben Durant for the next 9 months while he is on parental leave. New to E&E but a familiar face around BSB, Elizabeth brings a wealth of both animal husbandry as well as general technical officer experience. She'll be sitting at Ben's desk so please say hello when you walk past.



Welcome to **Franziska Hacker** (Farine Group, E&E) joined the Farine Group to start a PhD on dispersal and the effects of extreme weather conditions on movement in African wild dogs. Franziska completed her undergraduate and MSc degrees at the University of Sussex (UK), and conducted field projects in both the UK and South Africa. She'll now focus her efforts on using GPS trackers to identify how the movement of wild dogs, driven by life history and weather conditions, shapes the potential for human-wildlife conflicts, and identify strategies that population managers can use to mitigate these risks.

Welcome to **Hafiz Sabah-Ud-Din Mazhar** (Danila Group, PS). Hafiz completed his studies at the University of the Punjab, Pakistan, with the highest honours (Gold Medallist). Previously, he contributed to a number of studies – including in-silico-based comparative gene studies and working on the SUB1 gene in rice (field and lab-based) for his master's degree. He has joined the Danila Group, where he will be uncovering the secrets of leaf Plasmodesmata formation in the C3 and C4 crops using



a multi-omics and a microscopy-based approach.



Welcome to **Paolo Balahadia** (Danila Group, PS), who joined the Danila Group as a new Phd student on the 18th of March. Paolo completed a bachelor's and master's degree at the University of the Philippines Los Baños. He has 10 years of rice research experience, starting from the C4 Rice Center then later the Plant Pathology Group at the International Rice Research Institute. Paolo will be working on elucidating the role of plasmodesmal regulation in wheat immunity. In hopes of uncovering plasmodesmal regulators that could be harnessed for broad spectrum resistance against wheat pathogens.

Farewell

Farewell to **Shivam Bhardwaj** (RSB IT) who finished up at RSB on the 22nd of March to take up a Research Services Officer role with Research and Innovation Services. Shivam joined RSB last October, and has been a valued member of the IT Client Services team, We wish him all the best in his new role,



Grants Awarded

Jennifer Evans (Mikheyev Group, E&E) was awarded \$2500 for a continuing Holsworth Wildlife Research Endowment from the Ecological Society of Australia.



Caitlin Byrt (PS) was awarded \$848,730 for an ARC Mid-Career Industry Fellowship from the Australian Research Council in partnership with Rio Tinto.



Damien Farine (E&E) was awarded \$23,857 as a co-PI on a prestigious 'Wildlife Intelligence' grant awarded by National Geographic (one of only three projects selected worldwide). The project "The ecology and evolution of cultural and cooperative behavior among dolphins and humans" is led by Dr. Mauricio Cantor from Oregon State University. It will examine cooperative behaviour among dolphins and humans across four sites in India, Myanmar with two sites dedicated to Brazil. The team will examine whether specific ecological conditions have contributed to the evolution of human-dolphin cooperation among fishing communities in these regions, and whether the same behaviours between fishers and dolphins have evolved

at these four sites.

Florence Danila (PS) has been awarded a Thomas Davies 2024 grant to support her research in Plasmodesmata formation in C4 leaves.



Congratulations



Congratulations to internationally acclaimed wheat scientist **Tony Fischer** (Mathesius Group, PS), who was announced on the 12th of March 2023 as the recipient of the 2023 Crawford Fund Medal for his outstanding contributions to international agriculture.

Congratulations to **Ciara Wallis** (Corry Group, BSB) who has been named as one of four finalists in the NSW/ACT 7News Young Achiever Awards in the Academic Achievement category. The winners will be announced on the 24th of May. Whatever the outcome, it is a massive achievement to be named in the Top 4.



News



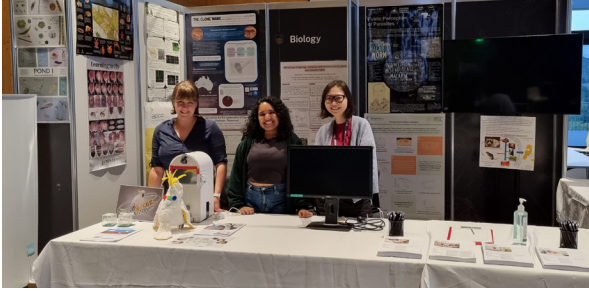
Australian Geographic have published an article written by **Sasha Mikheyev** (E&E) about the impact of Varroa mites on Australian bees. See "[How you can fight for Australia's honey bees in the war against Varroa mites](#)" for more information.

ABC News published an article on RSB PhD Graduate **Weliton Menario Costa's** (Kruuk Group, E&E) Dance your PhD competition winning video Kangaroo Time. See "[ANU Academic and singer-songwriter WELI wins global competition for music video about kangaroo socialisation](#)" for more information.

Emily Roycroft (Moritz Group, E&E) spoke with ABC Radio Canberra on the discovery of two new species of delicate mice. See "[ANU researchers discover two new species of native mice](#)" to listen to the interview.

Alexander Maier (BSB) spoke with ABC Radio Canberra about his recent receipt of science teacher of the year in the 2023 Awards for Teaching Excellence hosted by Universities Australia. Alexander's interview begins at the 1 hour 6 minute mark of the Canberra Afternoons broadcast. Please tune in for talk of flea circuses, parasites and human leaps over Black Mountain.

Outreach



During ANU Open Day 2024, RSB presented the diversity of life on land (moving plants and fleas), in the water (rotifers, stentor and vinegar eels) and in the air (cockatoos and lots of bees (25,000 to be precise)). The showcasing of different organisms created significant interest and the volunteers were flat out for the entire day explaining different study opportunities. Attentive visitors who correctly answered five biology questions were rewarded with coveted loupe magnifiers.



The visit of the Chancellor revealed a shortcoming in the risk assessment: while being bitten by a leech had been considered, the bite from the Chancellor was rather unexpected. However, Julie Bishop overcame her initial revulsion and walked away with a new appreciation for some of the featured spineless creatures.

Thank you to all the volunteers (Julia, Shefali, Maja, Uli, Andras, Rod, Kevin, Giel, Craig and Alex) and a big shout-out to Angela for organising everything in the background.

From the IDEA Committee

RSB staff and students can now gain access to the Fenner School parent's room. The room is on the ground floor of the Forestry Building (48), room FOR 0.19. To request access please email fennerschool@anu.edu.au. Access is limited to business hours (8:00-18:00) daily for non Fenner School users, unless a special request for after-hours access is approved.

Papers

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