

## **AIBSnews**

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# AIBSnews

MAY 2005/VOLUME 55 NUMBER 5

## Winners of 2005 AIBS Media Awards Announced

The American Institute of Biological Sciences is pleased to announce the winners of the 2005 AIBS Media Awards. The awards, established in 1995 to recognize outstanding reporting on biology to a general audience, are limited to nontechnical journalism, including print and broadcast media.

In the print journalism category, Tom Meersman, environment and natural resources reporter for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, won for "Invaded Waters," which covered invasive organisms in the Great Lakes. The story was published in three segments from 13 June to 15 June 2004. The judges noted that "the story treats a complex subject but was nevertheless outstanding in readability, accessibility, and organization, and it made clear points about how changes in the environment affect habitat. It was balanced—environmental writing tends to be one-sided, but in this article the author provided context. The whole package was beautifully designed: an outstanding story complemented with excellent photography."

Meersman has been reporting on environmental and natural resource issues in Minnesota and the Upper Midwest for the past 25 years. He has worked for the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* since 1993, and before that he was a reporter and producer for Minnesota Public Radio. Minnesota is the land of 10,000 lakes, the headwaters of the Mississippi, and the western edge of the Great Lakes, so his coverage often focuses on water quality. Many of Meersman's stories involve new science about emerging issues, especially in natural resource management and in public health. They also cover legislative and budget priorities, and how transportation policy, agricultural practices, and energy use affect environmental quality.

Diane Toomey won in the broadcast journalism category for "A Little Known Planet," which was broadcast on 12 December 2003 on National Public Radio's *Living on Earth*, a series covering environmental news. The judges said that the story, which examines current attempts to discover and catalog all the living organisms on Earth, "used clear and simple language for a lay audience to demonstrate how complex the natural world is. It used natural sounds effectively, and did not rely solely on people talking, allowing the audience to visualize scenes. An elegant and eloquent program."

Toomey has been working in public radio for 13 years as a reporter, producer, and editor. Most recently, she produced a pilot for a new science show for Ira Flatow, host of NPR's *Science Friday*. She is now working on a start-up show covering issues of poverty and injustice, sponsored by World Vision, one of the world's largest humanitarian aid groups.

An honorable mention for print journalism was awarded to Elizabeth Pennisi for "The Secret Life of Fungi," which appeared in *Science* on 11 June 2004. The judges called it "a great story, an original idea. It shows that a skilled journalist and writer can take the smallest of living objects and make it interesting."

Since 1996, Pennisi has been a science writer at *Science*, where she began covering cell biology and the genome; she now focuses on organismal biology. She started her career in science journalism at United Press International, and along the way has worked for *Discover*, *The Scientist*, and *Science News*.

The judges for this year's competition are

- **Laura Helmuth.** Laura Helmuth is the science editor for *Smithsonian Magazine*. She previously worked for *Science's* news department,

where she wrote about neuroscience research and edited life sciences stories. She started out at *Science* editing the daily online news site ScienceNOW. She holds a PhD in cognitive neuroscience from the University of California–Berkeley and went through the University of California–Santa Cruz science writing program.

- **Dennis O'Brien.** Dennis O'Brien has been a reporter at the *Baltimore Sun* since 1987 and has been writing about science for the past three years. Along with appearing in the *Sun*, his work has been featured in the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and a number of other papers.

## I N S I D E

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Recent Education Reports Online at [www.aibs.org](http://www.aibs.org)

- *Debbie Schwartz.* Debbie Schwartz is publisher of *Connexions Communications*, which specializes in environment and science news and features. Her work has appeared in the journals *Wildlife Conservation*, *Environmental Science and Technology*, and *Chemical Innovation*, as well as in newspapers and newswires.
- *Thomas Wood.* Thomas Wood is assistant professor of integrative studies in New Century College at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. He holds a BS from the University of California–Davis, an MS from Louisiana State University, and a PhD in environmental science and public policy from George Mason University. He works closely with research personnel at the National Zoological Park Conservation and Research Center, where his research interests involve conservation studies education reform and assisted reproduction in mammals.

### **Policy Office Expands Focus, Hires Public Affairs Representative**

For the past four years, Adrienne Sponberg served as public policy representative and then director of public policy for the American Institute of Biological Sciences and the American Society for Limnology and Oceanography. The joint appointment was the result of a strategic partnership established between AIBS and ASLO approximately five years ago. The arrangement provided both organizations with a means to develop their public policy presence in Washington, DC. As a result of this successful alliance, ASLO recently elected to hire a full-time director of public policy. Sponberg accepted the position and began full-time service with ASLO on 1 April 2005.

On 2 April, Robert E. Gropp assumed the post of director of public policy for AIBS. Gropp earned a BA in biology from the University of California–Santa Cruz and a PhD in botany from the University of Oklahoma. After graduate school, Gropp entered public service as a Presi-

dential Management Intern. In addition to federal agency experience, Gropp has worked on an array of policy issues on the House and Senate sides of Capitol Hill, as well as serving as an AIBS Congressional Science Fellow. Since 2002, Gropp has been AIBS's senior public policy representative.

To augment AIBS's influence in the policy arena and its effectiveness at bridging the communication gap between decisionmakers and the biological sciences community, Erin Heath has been hired to serve as public affairs representative in the Office of Public Policy. Heath recently returned to Washington, DC, from London, where she earned a master of science degree from the London School of Economics (LSE) and Political Science. While at LSE, she worked as a research assistant for an environment minister in the House of Commons. Heath has also been a reporter for *National Journal*, a nonpartisan public policy and politics magazine in Washington, DC, where she edited a weekly column and wrote articles about science and public health policy. Among the issues she covered were funding for the National Science Foundation, stem cell research, genetic discrimination, and space policy. Heath has a journalism degree from the University of Maryland at College Park.

To learn more about AIBS public policy activities, please visit [www.aibs.org/public-policy](http://www.aibs.org/public-policy).

### **AIBS at the 2005 NSTA National Convention**

The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) held its 53rd national convention in Dallas, Texas, 31 March through 3 April 2005. About 12,000 science educators from the United States and other countries, notably Mexico, participated in more than 1200 workshops and presentations, as well as in 51 short courses. They also had the opportunity to attend professional development sessions and presentations by distinguished speakers, go on field trips, and view exhibits. At the ribbon-cutting ceremony to mark the opening of the Exhibit Hall, Chris Castillo-Comer, science director for the Texas

Education Agency, remarked, "These are premium teachers. Science educators are responsible for the economy and future generations."

Eugenie Scott, executive director of the National Center for Science Education, explained how teachers could both teach evolution and defuse faith-based antagonism. She suggested making distinctions between the origin of life and evolution, and between methodological and philosophical materialism.

Nobel laureate Carl Wieman, of the University of Colorado, spoke on "Science Education in the 21st Century: Using the Tools of Science to Teach Science." He described current research that is providing insights on how people learn and explained how to enhance the teaching of science.

Other guest speakers were Cyril Isenberg, of the University of Kent, United Kingdom; James Rutherford, education advisor to the executive director of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; Ellen Vitetta, of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center; and George D. Nelson, of Western Washington University.

Oksana Hlodan, editor of the American Institute of Biological Sciences' Web site [ActionBioscience.org](http://ActionBioscience.org), attended the convention to learn about educational materials and research, to interview speakers, and to promote the Web site as an educational resource. At a presentation by Susan Van Gundy, director of education and outreach for the National Science Digital Library (NSDL), Hlodan was asked to describe the site to attendees because [ActionBioscience.org](http://ActionBioscience.org) is, as NSDL noted, an "exemplary resource of collections and services, organized in support of science education at all levels."

The aim of NSDL, which focuses on education in science, technology, engineering, and math, is to "both deepen and extend science literacy through access to materials and methods that reveal the nature of the physical universe and the intellectual means by which we discover and understand it." Thus, flyers about [ActionBioscience.org](http://ActionBioscience.org) were distributed at the NSDL booth and elsewhere at the convention.

Hlodan interviewed Ellen Vitetta, professor in the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, about using nature's poisons for biomedicine and biodefense. Vitetta spoke about using a portion of the ricin toxin to develop a new class of therapeutics, called immunotoxins. These molecules have been taken from discovery to clinical trials over the past two decades. Emerging from this work aimed at helping cancer patients was the development of a new and effective vaccine against ricin, which entered clinical trials at the end of 2004. The interview will soon be available at [ActionBioscience.org](http://ActionBioscience.org).

For more information, contact Oksana Hlodan (e-mail: [ohlodan@aibs.org](mailto:ohlodan@aibs.org)).

### NEON Approaches Planning Milestone

Members of the NEON Design Consortium (NDC) will convene in Estes Park, Colorado, in June 2005 for the third and final planning meeting for the National Ecological Observatory Network (NEON).

More than 160 scientists, educators, and engineers were chosen to serve on subcommittees of the NDC after NEON received funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) in September 2004. The two-year cooperative agreement between NSF and AIBS funds the NEON Project Office, housed at AIBS headquarters in Washington, DC, until June 2006, when NEON's National Network Design Committee will deliver a detailed project execution plan to NSF.

NDC members at the first design meeting, held in Los Angeles in January 2005, focused their discussions on NEON as a transformational enterprise for conducting ecological research and forecasting environmental change. Eight subcommittees identified research opportunities that could be pursued only through a long-term, continental-scale observatory network covering biodiversity, biogeochemical cycles, climate, infectious disease, invasive species, land use, hydroecology, and emerging issues.

"That first meeting was a new experience for everyone involved," said Jeffrey Goldman, NEON project manager and

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science office director at AIBS. "We wanted to ensure at the outset that transformational science would drive the NEON process and determine our infrastructure needs."

The Facilities and Infrastructure Committee also began its work in Los Angeles, tackling NEON requirements for IT and communications, research infrastructure, and sensor networking. Additional committees started planning NEON's educational components (for K-12, higher education, and informal education) and developing the organizational structure for NEON, Inc.

At the second NEON meeting, in Boston in March 2005, the NDC team took up the challenge of focusing the scope of NEON on a select group of essential science questions culled from the large pool of candidates identified in Los Angeles. NEON's staff of six postdoctoral associates contributed a unique decisionmaking tool to this process: a set of traceability matrices for matching measurable NEON science variables to the instrumentation infrastructure required to supply the necessary data. NDC planners used the traceability matrices not only to refine the scope of NEON but also to identify a network of shared infrastructure that will support research across all of the science disciplines within the project.

The final NDC meeting, to be held in Estes Park in June 2005, will focus on defining the prototype NEON field site—namely, what standardized sensor arrays will be required and how they will be deployed. This instrumentation network must not only meet data-collection, archiving, and information-sharing requirements, it must also be integrated with NEON's education programs and be upgradable over the project's 30-plus year life span.

The NEON Project Office solicited and received useful public comment on reports produced at the meetings in Los Angeles and Boston. Draft documents from the final meeting in Estes Park, Colorado, will be available for comment at [www.neoninc.org](http://www.neoninc.org) from late June through July 2005. The NEON National Network Design Committee will also invite input



on the project execution plan as that phase of NEON unfolds.

### **New Education and Outreach Program Assistant**

Abraham Parker is the new education and outreach program assistant at AIBS. He comes to AIBS from Cornell University, where he recently completed a graduate degree in science education. He also has a strong background and interest in ecology and field biology, having spent time as a research assistant at the Institute of Ecosystem Studies and the Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest. He is currently involved in several projects within the Education and Outreach Office, including development of diversity initiatives, an update of AIBS career-related resources and information, coordination of student chapters at colleges and universities, and collaboration with the AIBS public policy office on issues related to the teaching of evolution.

### **New NESCent Education Programs Manager**

Kristin Jenkins has been hired by AIBS to be education programs manager for the National Evolutionary Synthesis Center (NESCent; [www.nescent.org](http://www.nescent.org)) in Durham, North Carolina. Under the National Science Foundation grant to NESCent, AIBS provides educational services related to NESCent's goal of enhancing evolution research and understanding.

Jenkins earned a PhD in molecular and cellular biology from the University of Arizona. She has worked in education and outreach in a variety of settings. Jenkins will work on site in North Carolina, in coordination with AIBS staff headquartered in Washington, DC, to increase understanding and awareness of biological evolution among a diverse audience, including students, decision-makers, the general public, and the broader scientific community.

NESCent education initiative goals will include ways to integrate cutting-edge evolution science into the development of pedagogical materials for educators, and to increase accessibility of new ideas in the evolution education research community. NESCent will also

provide opportunities for collaboration within the evolution education community to generate new education and outreach initiatives and stimulate a greater understanding of evolution teaching and learning.

### **ActionBioscience.org and BEN, the Biological Science Education Portal**

The articles and lessons found on AIBS's ActionBioscience.org Web site are now part of the searchable collection of biology teaching resources at the BiosciEd-Net.org (BEN) portal. The BEN portal, managed by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, provides access to collections of teaching resources developed by a number of scientific professional societies, including the Ecological Society of America, the American Society of Microbiology, and the Botanical Society of America. ActionBioscience.org's growing collection of issues-based articles by distinguished scientists, educators, and other writers on a wide range of biological subjects, with links to additional resources, encourages students and teachers to learn more and get involved in the issues. All articles are peer-reviewed, many of them are accompanied by lesson plans written by professional educators, and about one-third are translated into Spanish. Visit the BEN portal at [www.biosciencednet.org](http://www.biosciencednet.org).

### **Recent Articles Online at [www.actionbioscience.org](http://www.actionbioscience.org) Original articles in English**

- "Resurrecting Extinct Megafauna," by Larry D. Agenbroad, professor emeritus, Northern Arizona University
- "Natural History Museum Collections in the Twenty-first Century," by Keith S. Thomson, professor emeritus of natural history, University of Oxford, United Kingdom
- "Antibiotic Resistance: New Approaches to a Historical Problem," a "Students Speak Out" article by Sean S. Kardar, graduate student

in the molecular and systems pharmacology program at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia

### **Spanish translations of previously posted articles**

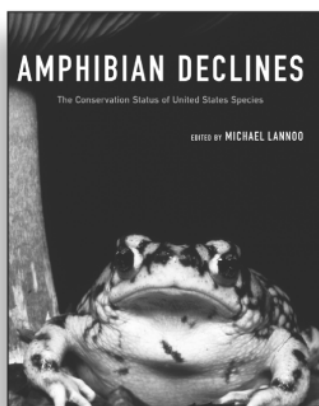
- "Las Especies, Especiación y el Medio Ambiente" (Species, Speciation, and the Environment), by Niles Eldredge, curator-in-chief of "Hall of Biodiversity," a permanent exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History in New York
- "Evite los Conceptos Erroneos Cuando Enseñe Sobre las Plantas" (Avoid Misconceptions When Teaching about Plants), by David R. Hershey, a biology education consultant and author who also answers botany questions for [madsci.org](http://madsci.org)
- "Bancos Genéticos de Plantas: Seguridad Alimenticia" (Plant Genebanks: Food Security), by Geoffrey C. Hawtin, interim executive secretary of Global Crop Diversity Trust, Rome, and Jeremy Cherfas, a biologist and science writer for International Plant Genetic Resources Institute, headquartered in Italy

### **Recent Public Policy Reports Online at [www.aibs.org](http://www.aibs.org)**

#### **Public Policy Report for 11 April 2005**

- Florida "Academic Freedom" bill could censor faculty, trigger lawsuits
- Intelligent design legislation introduced in Pennsylvania House
- AIBS Policy Office expands focus, hires public affairs representative
- Representatives to introduce loan forgiveness legislation for science majors
- Senate committee considers Bush's nominee to head EPA

# Biology Matters



## Amphibian Declines

The Conservation Status of United States Species  
Michael Lannoo, Editor

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Daniel D. Beck

With Contributions from Brent E. Martin and Charles H. Lowe.

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- New in *BioScience*: "The Biodefense Buildup: Fallout for Other Research Areas?"

- From the *Federal Register*

## Public Policy Report for 28 March 2005

- Arkansas intelligent design legislation dies in committee
- Survey shows science educators feel pressure to teach alternatives to evolution
- President's budget would eliminate historic biological and environmental research facility
- House Science Committee approves Supercomputer Revitalization Act
- From the *Federal Register*
- In the March issue of *BioScience*: "Will NSF's Education Initiative Be Left Behind?"
- Reminder: EPPLA application deadline is 1 April

## Recent Education Reports Online at [www.aibs.org](http://www.aibs.org)

- ActionBioscience.org and the Biological Science Education portal, BEN
- Call for collaborators: Study the effectiveness of TIEE
- Animal Behavior Society's Children's Book Award
- NAS president issues letter in support of evolution education
- Carnegie Foundation perspectives
- Call for reviewers: New documentary film on Ernst Haeckel
- New Deadline for NSF Course, Curriculum, and Laboratory Improvement Program

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