

UNIVERSITY

Students ready for ecology forum

By Sydney Sallabanks
Emerald Contributor

Kathy Schaeffer was a child intrigued by nature.

Growing up in California, she wondered why some plants and bugs died while others lived. Now Schaeffer is a second-year master's student at the University, but she has never shaken the question. Instead, she has made it her life.

Ecology, the study of the interactions between organisms and their environment, is the field in which Schaeffer said she found her niche.

"I've always been interested in why animals do what they do," she said. "I just never thought of it as a field until I took a class called Behavioral Ecology. I saw that there were theories and models and that opened up a whole new door for me."

"I knew that it wasn't just a passing interest."

Schaeffer is one of seven University students in ecology who will present their research to 82 students from nine West Coast schools at the 13th annual Pacific Ecology Conference.

Held at the Friday Harbor Laboratories in Washington's San Juan Islands this weekend, the conference is a forum in which West Coast graduate students will showcase their ecology research by making 15-minute presentations.

As Schaeffer puts the final touches on her master's thesis, she is gearing up to present the results at the conference. Two years researching the habitat aspects of the Oregon Silverspot butterfly — a threatened species found only in Oregon — have readied Schaeffer to tell her colleagues how the butterfly uses the density of violets and height of vegetation to determine where to lay its eggs.

"If we know where it lays its eggs," Schaeffer said, "we can manage the habitat and eventually take the species off the threatened list."

Roger Harris, a past conference participant and a final-year master's student, said the conference experience is valuable.

"A major research conference can be intimidating," Harris said. "The PEC has a very relaxed atmosphere, so it's a good place for students to get together and talk about ecology, to exchange ideas and to explore their own abilities."

"It's sort of a dress rehearsal for a major conference."

Maintaining the relaxed atmosphere means no faculty involvement in the student-run conference, which is organized each year by students from a different participating school. University of Washington students took on the task this year. Last year it was University students who did the planning.

The University has participated in every PEC, and Harris said he believes future University students would benefit from upholding this tradition.

"Part of training as a scientist is to get up and talk about your work, and most students who give talks end up improving the quality of their presentation," Harris said.

Although none of the talks presented is likely to shatter or alter scientific theories with earth-moving, epic discoveries, the participants say each offers insight and solutions to still unanswered, relevant questions about ecology and evolution.

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graduate student of ecology

Harris is set to present his "body-size evolution" research, which he said involves asking the question, "What makes animals the size that they are, particularly between species?"

Second-year master's student Lana Crumrine looks forward to her second PEC talk about the impacts on intertidal communities that are trampled by humans.

"One walk across might not cause any changes," she said, "but in certain tourist areas, people are constantly walking over tide pool areas, and it affects the entire intertidal community." Crumrine does her research in Newport and Lincoln County.

"People can have a huge impact on intertidal communities," she said. "Just picking up a rock and turning it over switches two communities, and both will die if left that way."

Second-year master's student Cheryl Kleckner said, "getting up and talking in front of people is the hardest part of being in science." Although she is nervous, Kleckner looks forward to getting feedback on her conference presentation about the interplay between ecology and evolution.

Kleckner uses mosquitoes to research why and how certain species evolved in relation to their environments.

"I measure factors such as temperature to see how that might influence the mosquitoes and how they might respond genetically," she said. Kleckner said she hopes her work eventually yields practical applications.

"If my research is applied, that will be my contribution." For now, she said she considers the conference a good starting point at which to present her work.

"It's not the National Academy of Sciences meeting," she said. "It's just a bunch of graduate students."

Actually, it's a bunch of graduate students and one undergraduate: biology senior Nikki Swets, who said she hopes her participation at the conference will give her an edge on the master's degree she plans to tackle next year. Her presentation will showcase her research on the evolution of biting in pitcher plant mosquitoes.

"Knowing the heritability of biting, what causes biting, will explain life history traits and costs of reproduction," Swets said. Part of her research involves sticking her hands into a vat of mosquitoes.

"They're not very vicious," she said.

Although the office has not significantly increased the number of citations given out since 1990-91, more staff have been charged with policing cyclists this year, Lee said.

ASUO President Jennifer Bills said she also believes campus security is overreacting to bicycle violations.

"If they spent more time fixing all the broken lights on the campus, that would be a better use of their time," Bills said.

Although few pedestrian-cyclist collisions occur at the University, Lee said campus security's regulation of cyclists is reasonable because of pedestrian's perceived concerns about safety. He said campus security has received several complaints from pedestrians about the way cyclists are riding on campus.

Campus security and the

University Student Health Center do not keep records of pedestrian-cyclist collisions.

University student Dan Geiger, an avid cyclist, said he is happy more officers are enforcing bicycle regulations on campus.

"I've been almost hit a couple of times by cyclists," he said. "Cyclists get lazy and try to screw whoever gets in their way. I don't think it's a very good attitude."

Carey Drayton, director of campus security, said his staff must enforce all regulations, including bicycle rules, that the University institutes.

Drayton said students who have problems with University bicycle regulations should submit written suggestions for changes to the Office of Public Safety, Straub Hall.

BIKES

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vidual," he said.

But some students wonder if the incident is just an extreme example of an office that has become unnecessarily overzealous in policing campus cyclists.

University student Brian Hoop, who served on a campus bicycle user committee last year, said he believes campus police shouldn't waste their time ticketing cyclists.

"Bicyclists need to be more responsible and aware of the pedestrians on campus," Hoop said. "But using police to enforce bicycle regulations should be an overextension of public safety's authority."

Since this fall, campus security has given 1,099 \$10 tickets to cyclists.

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By GARY LARSON



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