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Research frontiers of early-career biogeographers

Research done for a doctorate provides opportunities for innovative and cutting-edge research. PhD students are typically fully dedicated, not yet tainted by prejudices from a long career, and eager to overcome obstacles to establish themselves in their chosen career. Research conducted at this stage of a biogeographer's career, overseen by established practitioners, is an opportunity to push forward the boundaries of knowledge, explore new areas and approaches, and, sometimes, break well-established paradigms.

Student members represent about one third of the International Biogeography Society's (IBS) membership. This year the IBS and *Frontiers of Biogeography* are conferring a new award, aimed at promoting new knowledge and new energy in the field of biogeography. Following an initiative of the IBS' Early Career Biogeographers Committee, we have established the Doctoral Dissertation Award, to recognize an outstanding doctoral thesis in the field of biogeography. This award will be granted periodically to the best doctoral dissertation, starting biennially to coincide with the IBS early-career conferences. Candidates are judged on the basis of thesis abstracts submitted to *Frontiers* by recently graduated PhDs (up to two years after obtaining their PhD). To be considered for the award, candidates should submit a thesis abstract to *Frontiers*, indicating that they wish to be considered for the award. The subject matter must fall within the remit of the journal. All thesis abstracts received by *Frontiers* at any time can be put forward for consideration for the prize in the next round of judging. Different countries have different systems (e.g., studying for a PhD takes longer in the USA than in the UK), and these differences are considered in the judging process. Candidates may therefore wish to provide an outline of the process by which their educational institute awards the PhD.

The main purpose of the Doctoral Dissertation Award is to recognize outstanding perform-

ance at this important stage in the career of a researcher. The winner of the award will receive a certificate and a grant to cover a portion of the travel and registration costs for attending the next early-career conference (preferably) or other IBS meeting¹. This prize complements the other two regular IBS awards², the Alfred Russel Wallace and MacArthur and Wilson awards, which recognize outstanding mature and mid-career scientists, respectively. It furthers the efforts of the IBS to promote early-career biogeographers (Santos 2011), in conjunction with the early-career conferences that started in 2011. These meetings provide space for young scientists to meet and actively discuss the field and their careers. The meetings create an excellent atmosphere for networking, developing interactions that will lead to successful collaborations, and forming bonds that will help produce a more comprehensive and integrative biogeography (Nogué et al. 2011).

The mechanism of judging via *Frontiers of Biogeography* thesis abstracts takes profit from this journal's efforts to promote the work of young biogeographers (see, for example, Morales-Castilla 2013). The pressure to publish in high-profile, peer-reviewed journals has resulted in a gradual, but unavoidable, evolution from PhD theses as monographs to collections of papers, with little or sometimes no effort to provide a synthesis of the work. The value for the student of a well-developed, holistic discussion of the contribution of the dissertation research is one of the recurrent themes of conversations during the receptions after PhD defences³. Many argue that such synthesis benefits both the student's development and the advancement of research. However, the number of people that believe that such effort is worthless unless it is published is increasing. These were the main reasons why the *Frontiers* editorial board created the thesis abstract section in the first place, along with the benefit of promoting the already-published papers.

¹ <http://www.biogeography.org/html/Meetings/index.html>

² http://www.biogeography.org/html/About%20IBS/about_ibs.html

³ Also called vivas or examinations, depending on the academic system.

This year the IBS reviewed applications from early-career biogeographers from Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Germany, India, Mexico, Spain and the USA. About a third of those submissions came from the USA, 13% from Mexico and 13% from Brazil. One quarter of the applications were from women. Applicants for the awards had conducted research in areas including marine biogeography, conservation biogeography, the biogeography of life-history traits, the development of new tools in macroevolution, and novel approaches exploring the modelling of species' distributions and the relationship between niche and distribution range.

The IBS Early Career Biogeographers Committee led the evaluation process. The main criteria considered were the novelty of the research, clarity and specificity of the research questions, theoretical framework appropriate to the objectives, originality of the data, methodological tools applied, recognition of the scope, limitations and implications of the research, and the potential impact in the general field of biogeography. The quality of the abstracts in the inaugural pool was excellent. Many proposed new approaches to the study of biogeography. It was not an easy task to select the winner.

We are pleased to announce that the winner of the inaugural award is Dr. Matthew Iacchi from the Department of Oceanography, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. In his research, Dr. Iacchi explored the geographic scale of genetic connectivity of three lobster species (in which pelagic larval duration is not limiting). In addition, Dr. Jesse Morris from the Department of Geography, Kansas State University, received an honourable mention for his work developing a proxy-based method to infer past disturbances of bark beetle assemblages, using lake sediments. Both thesis abstracts are currently in review for publication in the journal.

Both the IBS and *Frontiers of Biogeography* wish to thank those who submitted thesis synopses for this award. We encourage young biogeographers to submit such summaries of their dissertations, and apply for the award, in the future.

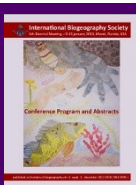
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The abstract book of the 6th IBS Biennial Meeting is available at:

<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/3kb4c5jr>

<http://www.biogeography.org/html/Meetings/2013/program.html>.