

U C Davis Ecology
Graduate Group

Spring 2004, Issue 4

the egg

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"TO HECK WITH CHICKENS,
WE CAME FIRST!"

Let's Go Rafting!



Several ecology graduate students were recently spotted on the Klamath River in northern California. Get out of Davis this summer on a rafting or inflatable kayaking trip. Outdoor Adventures at UC Davis (in the silo) runs three-day Klamath trips featuring bald eagles, osprey, salmon, insect hatches, great food, remote campsites, warm water, and Class II-III rapids. To get more information, or to reserve a spot call OA at 754-1995.

Editor's Note from the Field

Whew! I finally found the time in the midst of a crazy beginning to my field season to write this editor's note. Sorry it's taken me so long, Beth. And sorry to everyone else if I seem a little distracted—I have a lot of things on my mind these days.

The funny thing about collecting data (data...data...oh yeah—*data sheets*—gotta update those data sheets, and copy those other ones for the crew...)... anyway, the funny thing about collecting data is... um... oh crap, I forget what I was going to say. Gotta start getting more sleep. But really, what I was getting at was that (omigod I really have to order that equipment for next week)... I mean the thing is—waitaminute, I still have to develop that protocol that we hoped to start in 10 days—I don't have time for this—maybe the EGG readers will understand...

Have a great summer everyone (no time to type exclamation points)

Matt

Letters to (aquired by) the egg

Dear Team POE,

I just woke up with an abrupt jump and an loud "Ahhhh!", my heart racing and breathing hard from a dream I was having—about the new option for the ecology qualifying exam: *X-TREME POE!* Okay, so it was really scary at first, but then I started thinking about it and had to share. Here's how it worked: Grad students were split up into teams of two. (In my case, it was me and Sam. Granted, he's not taking the POE...). Silvia, Marcel, and Ted designed a maze/network of tunnels and paths that students must get through in order to pass the test. Some paths were above ground, but others required swiming underwater. Along the way there were all sorts of physically/psychologically challenging obstacles (e.g., "you must eat this bug before you can go any further", or "compare and contrast metapopulation theory to island biogeography"). Teams set off with a map given to them with just enough detail to get them to the next section, where they would find the next map section. And so on. Silvia, for some reason, followed us through the course the whole time, goading us on, "Hey... see if you can get past this one!" or "Hey, bet you wish you had prepared more for this!" Just before I woke up screaming, Sam and I were getting through an especially dicey leg of the maze: we had to swim out to the middle of a pool where there was a narrow vertical tube, about 20' long and filled with water, that connected to the bottom of the pool. The idea was that we had to swim down through the tube and (hopefully) find some sort of cave at the end where there would be air, and the next map section. (see below)* Since I didn't get past this part, beyond this is open to speculation. I supposed the end of the test would be something like those reality shows: teams get through the course and run up to some contrived welcome station where they are greeted by Ed Caswell-Chen and told, very dramatically, "P-Diddy... J-Train... You're team number one!! Congratulations! You're a PhD." Good luck to those on Team POE. Just think... it could be worse.

--Jason

*(Needless to say, based on the fact that I woke up screaming, things went terribly wrong with this part of the test, and Sam and I ended up ummmm... let's just say, "not passing").



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The attempts at humor expressed in this newsletter do not reflect the more mature, much more mature, intellects of the Graduate Group in Ecology, or the students, faculty, and staff, therein.
Thank you for your understanding.

PASSING YOUR ORALS: PART 2

by Jake Kerby

(Recap- I am the Brad Pitt look-alike that took his orals twice and is trying to offer some knowledge that I have learned from the ordeal).

So you have done everything. You have studied for weeks on end, met with professors, cruised through mock orals, re-read my last EGG article and orals are tomorrow. Feeling good right? Or perhaps this is that moment you find whatever God you have and start making deals... Better idea: just read this article and have no worries about the test whatsoever.

So in talking to folks, it seems as if there are a thousand different strategies for taking orals. Just like in Vegas, everyone has a method they swear by- hopefully this will work better than my "bet on number 13" roulette strategy... That being said, here are the keys to your success:

There are a few things that end up being important and are often overlooked in this process. The first is the order of your examiners. Most chairs will let you select the order you want to be questioned in. Most of the time the order ends up being whatever order they end up sitting in. You should know that you can choose and let your chair know ahead of time so he/she can direct it to go that way. Why should you care about the order? Well anyone who knows me, knows that I am a huge NBA fan- and I think that just as in basketball if you hit those first couple shots, then you will start rolling and the confidence will build and you will perform better. This is the argument for putting your "slam dunk" testing area first. The counterpoint to this is that at the end of the exam you may very well be mentally exhausted and nailing some open jumpshots at the end of the game can be huge (sorry taking the analogy too far). The point is, think about it. If there are sections you don't feel as good about, or others you feel really confident in- place them accordingly- it may make a difference.

Second, you can take breaks! Gauge how you are doing in the exam and don't be afraid to call for a bathroom break at some point. It may be a great way to gather yourself after a tough bout. It probably isn't

good form to ask for a break mid-questioner "Explain May's concept of connectance." "Can I go to the bathroom?" A good break might be either after a tough section or right before your last section. Don't charge through unless you are feeling really good. In reality (because we all know these professors are always having to leave for their next appointment) five minutes of break could also mean five less minutes of questions!

Next, use the board! This is a great technique for slowing things down. Writing the concepts on the board also helps you wrap your mind around things as you write them. Take the first opportunity you have to jump up to that board, there is something powerful about wielding a felt tip marker. Just resist those urges to throw it at the questioner...

The not so big secret- everyone gets stumped. Don't completely fold because you freeze on a question or don't state it smoothly or just don't know what the hell they are talking about. Everyone will admit to getting questions that they had no idea what the examiner is asking at first (I have even had professors confess that they had no idea what a fellow examiner was getting at). Don't be afraid to ask them to restate or clarify it. Some professors like to actually push you in a topic until they stump you- so if you end every topic being stumped this may actually not be a bad thing. Some may want you to say a specific term that have trouble coming up with- if this happens, try Ben Kenobi's Jedi mind trick "These are not the droids you are looking for, move along..." (By the way, consider yourself a geek if you actually know the scene I just referred to).

The take it or leave it stuff:

For your presentation, practice your first 2 or 3 slides like a hundred times (this is a good tip for presentations in general). You will be nervous when you start and these are the first words out of your mouth. I have found that if I can go on automatic for a slide or two- my nerves calm down and then I can roll through the rest of the presentation.

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KERBY (continued from previous page)

In terms of answering questions, I found that using the “funnel technique” worked well for me (a tip given to me by my advisor). Any general question I was asked- I always sought first to answer it on a broad scale. Define the terms, throw in some names, give a general concept. After that, I would try to focus into a concrete example that I knew, or perhaps even relate it to my research if I could. It seems like most examiners just want to know that you are well read and are able to think outside of what you do. Bringing it back to what you do lets them know that you have made connections (but really it just brings you back to an area that you feel more comfortable with). Obviously, doing this with every question would be a bad idea, but if you can think of connections on the spot- use them!

Lastly, have no fear. You should have fear weeks before the exam because that will motivate you to study. The day of the exam though, there is really nothing more you can do- so have no fear. Like I said in the last article, the worst you can do is not pass. Although this seems like the end of the world (and for a few hours it felt that way to me) it really is not. (This is the part where I get deep and spiritual- so if you are not into that kind of stuff stop reading). The lesson I learned about not passing the oral exam the first time around is that being a graduate student in ecology is not all that I am. I volunteer to help with high school kids. The greatest revelation to me (and the reason I am sharing this part) was that these kids did not care if I passed or not. They know me as Jake, and probably still don't quite understand what the test is or why anyone would choose to take it. Passing or not passing that test mattered not to them even though it seemed crushing to me. Certainly you have friends and family that support you the same. While it can seem like the most important thing in the world, keep perspective, because it really is not. With this in mind, walk into that testing room knowing that you are loved and that you can only do the best you can. The confidence and calmness that comes with that is perhaps the best “strategy” that anyone could offer. Just make sure when you pass you give me credit. Good luck!

(I will be selling inspirational buttons- please contact Matt S. for details)

p.s. I am supposed to keep this on the down low (in case Bush yanks the funding), but... I got an EPA STAR grant! I really believe that having to take the exam again in part forced me to rethink my proposal which really made it a ton better. So now will you stop stressing, because I am proof that even if you do not pass the first time you can still get a fat

Style horoscope

Use your clothes to predict your future!

by Erin Espeland

What are **YOU** wearing today?

- jeans
- a light cardigan or sweatshirt
- tevas
- zip-off pants
- a short-sleeved, button down shirt with fish printed on it
- none of the above

a) As a jeans-wearer in hot weather, you have a healthy sense of paranoia about the world. This serves you well in situations where you need to perform emergency car repair or leap onto a motorcycle at a moment's notice. Others see you as dependable and you will always be employed with a project on-the-go. Beware of teva-wearers. Seek zip-off pants wearers.

b) Wearers of overlays are prepared for inclement indoor weather. A hard worker, putting in long hours at the office or lab, you are very productive. Your uncomplaining, can-do attitude will insure your success. Beware the zip-off pant. Seek jeans- or fish-shirt-wearers.

c) You are an excellent team player and ready for adventure as long as it includes some of your favorite people! Your strength in creating networks is especially helpful in business endeavors. Seek zip-off pants wearers. Avoid jeans-wearers.

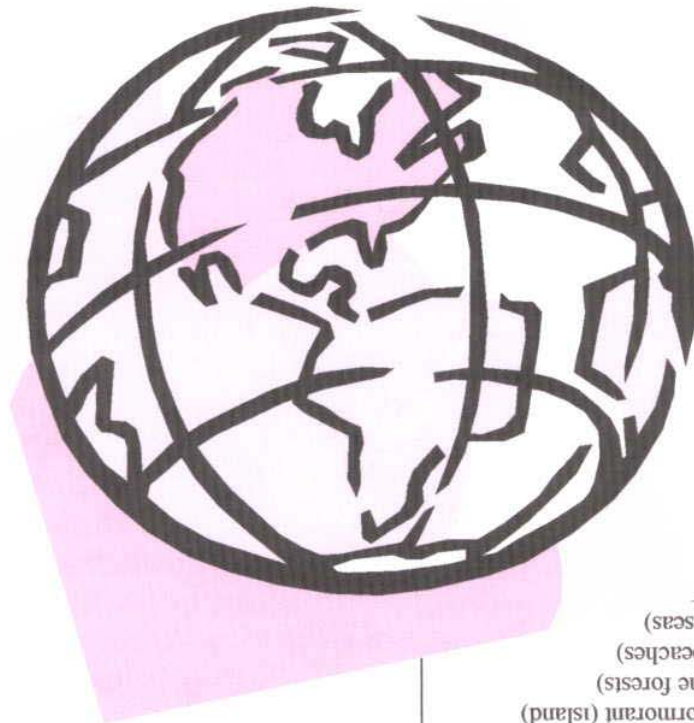
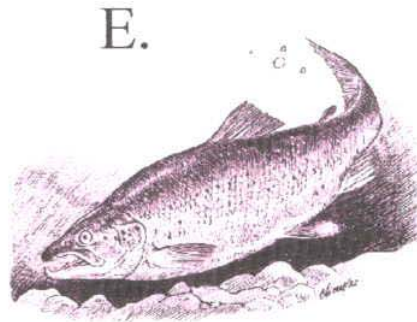
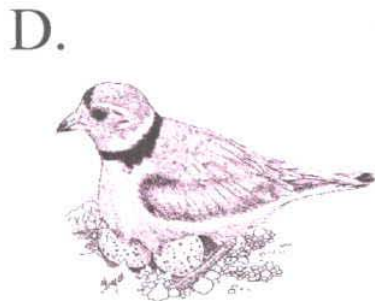
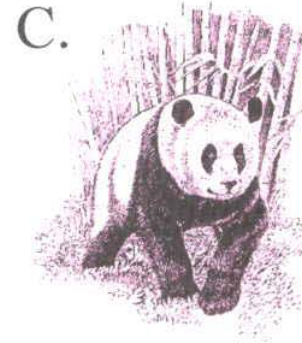
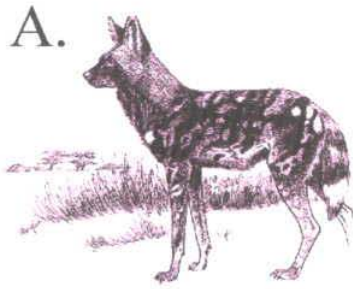
d) Delighting in the unknown, cheered by the thought of unpredictability, you sail through life with the optimism of one who is ready for anything. Your openness will bring you good fortune in love and work. Seek jeans-wearers or fish-shirt wearers. Avoid the cardigans.

e) Flexible and entertaining, you are the chameleon of the ecology fashion world. Able to find comfortable, good fun in whatever life presents you, others look to you to find the silver lining. Happy-go-lucky, with respect for the rules, you will be invited to all the good parties – a well-liked member of any work team. Many compatibilities – jeans are difficult.

f) Iconoclastic in every way – vain and high-tempered. Others are attracted to you for your unique, if somewhat adversarial, persona. Your mystique will attract both lovers and potential employers. Avoid everyone.

Endangered and Threatened Species

Identify the endangered species, and draw an arrow from the animal to its preferred habitat.



answers

- | | |
|----|--|
| a. | African wild dog (African plains) |
| b. | Galapagos frigateless cormorant (island) |
| c. | Giant panda (sub-alpine forests) |
| d. | Piping plover (sandy beaches) |
| e. | Atlantic salmon (high seas) |

Book Reviews

by Erin Espeland

When the weather is hot, or you're just fried from a long day of counting things, a book, a cold drink and an electric fan are all you need.

Here are two books I read recently. Both, incidentally, about runaways. Go figure.

Middlesex by Jeffery Eugeneides

I didn't read The Virgin Suicides, which this guy also wrote. I liked Middlesex a lot. It was the novel-with-everything. Life in the old country, immigration to America, life in Detroit when cars were king and then the Black Muslims became prominent. Growing up as a girl in the 60s. Growing up as a boy in the 60s. A runaway story. A porn-star story. People you've heard of show up in this story. A story that could have been a small novel about a child growing up with a misidentified gender turns into an American epic worthy of Michener in scope and juicy sex, but without the heft and caricature. Eugeneides creates characters that ring true, even in the middle of bizarre situations – he convinced you that these could have been *your* neighbors. Issues of sexual identity, gender, race, class, and ethnicity are explored in a very intimate way, lending extra dimensions to Humanity rendered simple by Oprah and Newsweek. Pacing at the start was slow, but perhaps it should be in Cyprus just prior to World War II. Once it got going, though, this novel was a page-turner, a real adventure story but with added depth that makes it memorable and me actively glad I read it.

Postcards by E. Annie Proulx

Annie Proulx has written some of the best short stories I have ever read. No one beats her in expressing the subtleties and varieties of the general love that human beings have for one another. The novel Postcards, however, is about disconnection and loss. A young man commits a heinous crime for mysterious reasons and then flees home to hide the crime and avoid its consequences. Through a bizzare mishap, he ends up with about a hundred postards, all with a picture of a bear on them, and for the rest of his days, drifting about the US, he occasionally sends one home to his parents and little sister. The impoverished sentences he writes on the cards serve only to communicate where he is or where he is going. But, with no return address, the family doesn't really know where he is or how to reach him. He continues to send the cards to a family that only exists in his head, never ages, meets with catastrophe, changes or dies.

Proulx's power with words causes the reader to disconnect from the start. Her perfect turns of phrase, using words and expressing sentiments her characters have no access to in their limited, impoverished reality isolates the reader from the miseries of the Vermont winter and the squalor of the homestead. I looked in from outside – pushed out by the wordcraft and repelled by the violence underlying the familial relationship. The prose did not draw me toward the runaway, but ejected me, along with him, from the farm. I followed him throughout his life, which was punctuated by the postcards he sends home. Perhaps a portrait of this drifter is what's intended, but the pervasive sense of isolation permeates through to the reader and I was left only with the academic interest of solving the mystery presented at the start of the book. This hope was thwarted and I was left only with the perfection of the prose and the unblemished reflection of novel form onto postcard function.