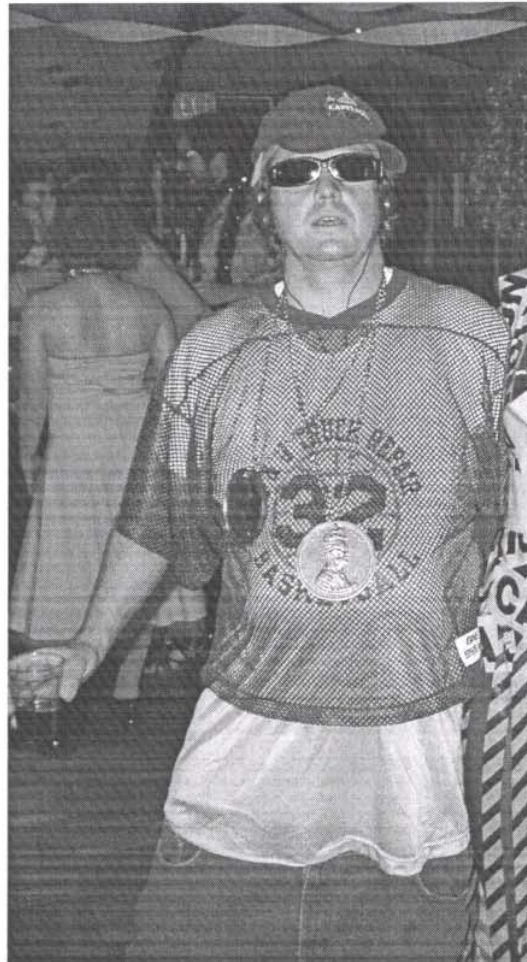


# the egg

Your thin-membraned semi-regular newsletter

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Fall 2004, Issue 2  
November 10



## New Chair Mark Schwartz Flaunts His Pay Raise Around His Neck

*In this slim issue:* Erin's latest book review, a new take on the electoral college, the 2004 Ecolympics, and, well, a couple of ads

## Editor's Corner

Another fall is upon us, full of dread and sorrow and hopelessness...oh, sorry, it's just too close to November 2<sup>nd</sup>. Well, unlike in the U.S. as a whole, it's a time of regime change here in the GGE. We have a new chair, Mark Schwartz, who promises to bring a hip-hop sensibility to an otherwise country-western job. I have no idea what that means. In any case, we welcome Mark as chair and extend our gratitude to Ed-Caswell Chen for all his hard work on behalf of the GGE!

In line with EGSA's plea for help in this issue, I'll take this opportunity to say that EGG issues like this are what happens when almost nobody contributes articles—95% crap from me! So please, for the sake of your fellow readers, write something for the next issue. My e-mails have contained a litany of potential submissions, so here I'll just say that we'll take just about ANYTHING.

On the radar for the next few months are the GGE retreat at Bodega Bay, the Bay Area Conservation Biology Symposium in Palo Alto, the annual Mardi Gras masquerade ball, and, of course, the revolution.

Several readers (okay, one) wondered about the answers to last issue's "Are you a first-year?" quiz. Sadly, the answers got cut off, but basically, it said that if you were doing the quiz, then you were reading the EGG, and therefore, you had to be a first-year, because everyone else knows better. While we aspire to a larger readership, we're not fooling ourselves. And likewise, if you're reading this, then you're reading the EGG, and, first-year or not, we thank you.

- Matt  
November 9, 2004

P.S. Did I mention we could use some submissions?

## EGSA THOUGHTS from your co-chairs Al and Al

EGSA is looking for a few more volunteers. We need a few people to be on the ADMISSIONS, AWARDS, and CURRICULUM committees. These jobs are not time intensive. Plus you get to work with Silvia. Also, it's a good way to get to know how the academic system works here at UCD.

We also are in need someone to help with the GGE T-shirts. Theresa Talley, the kind soul, has done it for three years. Thank you Theresa. Now it is her time to leave the nest. Is there someone out there to lend a hand?

Remember, EGSA meetings—the forum to discuss the GGE—are held the second Wednesday of every month. Plus there is good food provided.

E-mail Alex at [akfremier@ucdavis.edu](mailto:akfremier@ucdavis.edu) if you'd like to help out!

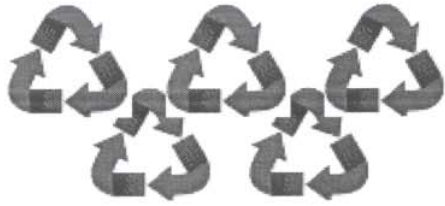


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The attempts at humor expressed in this newsletter do not reflect the more mature—much more mature—intellects of the Graduate Group in Ecology, or those of the students, faculty, or staff therein. Thank you for your understanding.



## Report from the 2004 Ecolympics

Portland, Oregon, August 1-5, 2004  
Matt Schlesinger, EGG conference-goer  
and writer-abouter

The 2004 Ecolympics were held this year in Portland, Oregon, during the Ecological Society of America's 89<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. Thousands turned out to root for ecologists from their home countries as they competed for the coveted Rock, Loam, and Scat medals. Here we report some of the highlights from this year's games.

**The talk-to-talk dash:** In this event, participants run from one talk to another, never arriving later than the title slide, and never leaving before the applause. This year, the rock medal was won by Erik Slovosgard of Czech Republic University, who managed to run from one session to another all of Tuesday afternoon, never staying in any session for more than one talk. What impressed the judges most was his astonishing information retention rate of 14% despite his running around, well above the 3% achieved by the average attendee.

**The end-of-talk schedule consultation:** Often taken by the winner of the talk-to-talk dash, this event favors competitors who can decide between two equally appealing talks, or better yet, between three or more somewhat appealing talks, in a matter of seconds. This year's loam medalist was generalist Pedro Salazar of Winnipeg University, who rapidly flipped through the schedule to choose a talk on dung beetle genetics over talks on sea squirt mating and sexual dimorphism in rice, all of which he

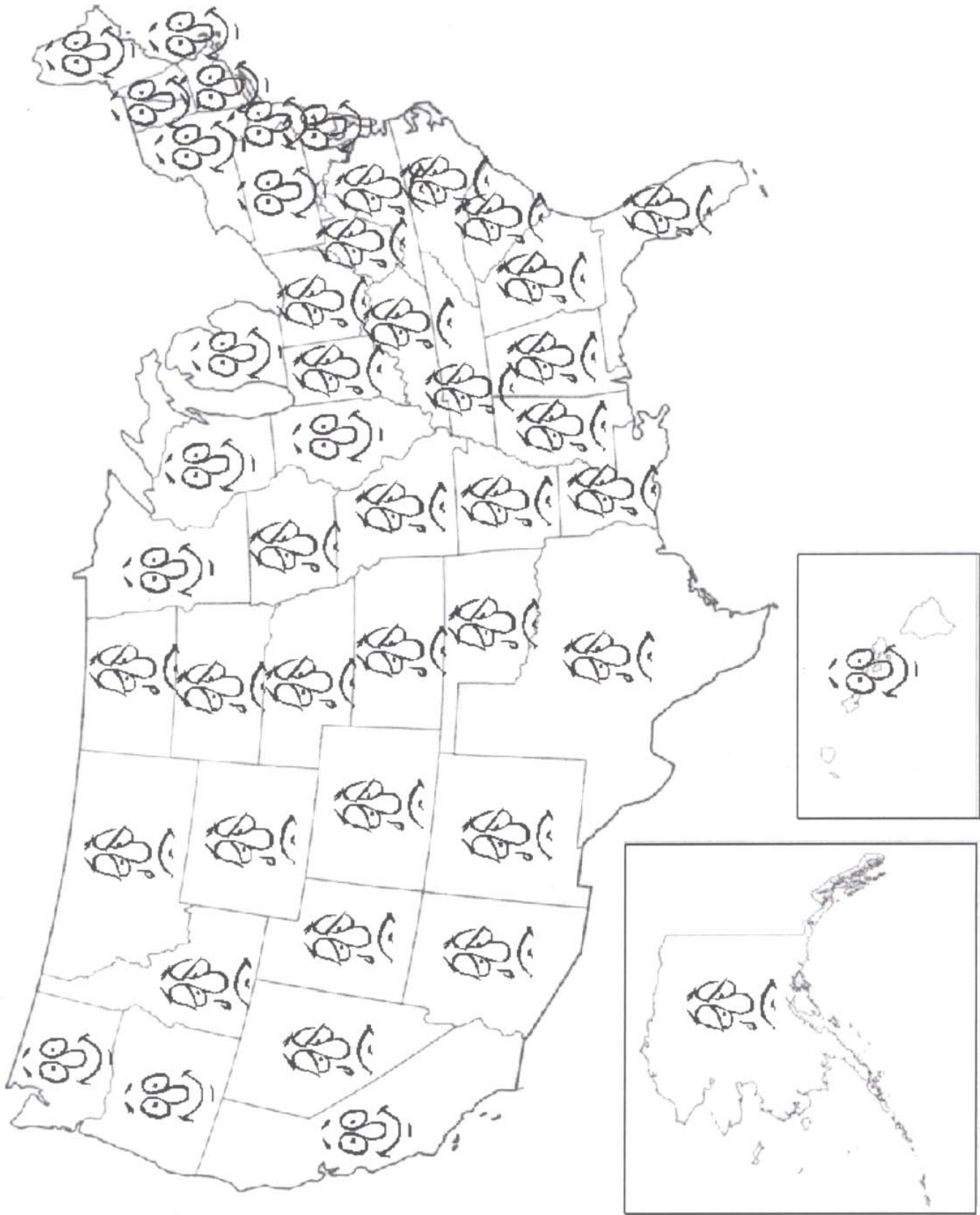
had previously highlighted, underlined, *and* starred.

**The 50-m idol approach:** Participants in this event have the daunting task of approaching an ecologist they especially admire, from a presumably safe distance of 50 m. Participants identify their favorite ecologists *a priori*. This year's scat medalist was Isabel Halberstam of the University of Vermont, who got up the nerve to talk to Michael Rosenzweig, despite his being involved deeply in conversation with the caterer and several other prominent ecologists about an emergency shortage of mini-muffins for break times. Ms. Halberstam confidently strode up, stuck out her hand, and launched into a description of her research, holding Dr. Rosenzweig's attention for nearly 20 minutes and earning one of the only perfect 10s in this year's Ecolympics. (Competitor Dan Bluth was not so lucky as he approached Stuart Pimm, blurting out, "Hi, I'm Stuart Pimm. Pleased to meet me," and tripping over Dr. Pimm's backpack.)

**The 5-day marathon:** Everyone attending the conference was a participant in this event, with the loam medal going to Eve Tinsley of UCLA, who not only attended a talk in every possible time slot, but also attended an evening session every day, went to several special banquets, including that of the Marine Ecologist Left-handed Octogenarians Subchapter, attended a 4 AM workshop entitled, "Restoring Old-growth Forests by Tearing Down Redwood Decks When People Aren't Home," and went on field trips both before the conference (Molds of Portland's Used Bookstores) and after (Saddlin' Up Orcas and Ridin' 'em Around).

**The 5-year hurdles:** Open only to Ph.D. students, none of whom could actually enter the event because they were busy filling out forms.

Don't forget to train for 2008!



# Alternatives to the Electoral College System

by Matt Schlesinger

Take a look at the map on the facing page, which depicts the results of a recent U.S. election. Whether you're a Republican, Democrat, or a member of some hapless third party, it should be obvious that the outcome of the election is highly dependent upon how one reads the map. Simple tallying of electoral votes should have gone the way of the Yugo many years ago. What I will propose here is not, I repeat, NOT, just some mental by-product of a despondent, shocked, delusional voter, but simply common sense. The current Electoral College system clearly has got to go. The following are some of the myriad ways to read the electoral map that would have resulted in a more fair election result:

- 1) The victor should be the candidate with the greatest geographical range in the continental U.S.—that is, the greatest distance between states won. For instance, if a candidate wins both California and Maine, hypothetically speaking, he or she should win the election. Alaska and Hawaii would be excluded from this calculation because...well, because I don't know the distances between those states and the mainland and don't feel like researching it.
- 2) The candidate winning the states with cooler voters should win the election. In an "Electoral Coolage" system, each state would be awarded "Cool Points" based on the hipness of their populace. Clearly, California and New York would get the most Cool Points, followed by Illinois, Oregon, Washington, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, all of New England, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Much cooler voters there than elsewhere.

(Just think about which states are probably choosing the American Idol winners.) Most of the South and the Intermountain and Great Plains states, while they would do fine in a system relying on Nice Points, would score relatively poorly on Coolness. Such is the way of the Electoral Coolage.

- 3) If, just if, you took the two-letter postal abbreviations of all the states won by a candidate, put them together, and could rearrange them to spell "MY CAPTAIN JOHN, DEMCRAT, WIL WIN AMERICA" with the remaining letters "MNDPDMV" (which clearly stands for "My Nimble Democratic Party Declares Monstrous Victory"), then that candidate should win.
- 4) Yes, I actually worked that one out.
- 5) Any candidate winning three western states whose first letters spell "COW" should win the election.
- 6) Whoever wins Texas should automatically lose ten other states.
- 7) Better yet, any candidate who sweeps the states with "panhandles" should lose the election entirely.
- 8) If states had "spatulas," then a candidate winning those states should also lose.
- 9) Although this has nothing to do with the electoral map, any candidate whose running mate's name can be rearranged to spell "Needy Chick" should lose the election, while any candidate whose name can be rearranged to spell "Horny Jerk" should win, despite the connotation.



## Book Review by Erin Espeland

The Tattooed Girl by Joyce Carol Oates

I told a friend of mine that I was reading this book and he said, “Woo, Joyce Carol Oates – I’ve heard she’s pretty dark.” I’ve read other books of hers and, yes, they’re dark, but something about darkness satisfies my Nordic soul. Confirmation of bleakness in the world is about as fulfilling as that long tonic bass note in a Bach organ fugue. The way Carol Oates sees, understands that poisonous area in our hearts... well, when you’re digging through the mud and you get to that deepest blackest part, drier and grittier, it almost looks like redemption.

Joshua Seigl is a writer. Independently wealthy, he can write or not, play chess or not, hire an assistant or not. He is stricken by an undefined neurological condition that makes it more imperative that he hire an assistant, but he doesn’t really know what he wants and ends up rescuing a bookstore worker-waif (Alma Busch) from the tyrannical owner. The Tattooed Girl is almost entirely written from conversations that Josh has with himself and Alma has with herself. For the most part actions and relationships do not form the plot: the crazy internal dialogue that each character is lost in drives the book forward. Of course the book is a chamber of horrors – imagine if someone wrote a book unflinchingly depicting **your** internal dialogue with almost nothing from the outside to give it perspective? What makes the book particularly disturbing is Alma’s virulent anti-Semitism which is shown to be inseparable from her own lack of humanity. Carol Oates’ book is a warning about what happens when you abuse puppies (Alma). She does this by looking at, and not once looking away from, the churning insides of the outwardly-submissive dog.

If you think you are up for a Gothic novel, there is no better place to start than with Joyce Carol Oates. She never preaches, and you never are forced to mentally step back from the page by an odd or awkward turn of phrase. She draws you in and holds you. She is truly America’s post-Freudian Edgar Allen Poe, so dig in. The pit awaits.

**SAVE THE  
DATE!**

**SATURDAY**

**FEBRUARY  
5, 2005**

**MARDI GRAS  
MASQUERADE  
CHARITY BALL**

