

2014 AAAS SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING MASS MEDIA FELLOW

KATIE LANGIN

DEGREE: PH.D., ECOLOGY
SCHOOL: COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
SPONSOR: BURROUGHS WELLCOME FUND
MEDIA SITE: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Research Focus: Microgeographic adaptation in an island-endemic bird

Translation: Many organisms have characteristics that make them particularly well-suited to their local environment. For instance, animals living at northerly latitudes tend to have adaptations that help survive in cold climates. My research on a bird called the Island Scrub-Jay has revealed that that adaptive differences between individuals can also evolve within a single population. The species is entirely restricted to a single island, yet individuals have different beak shapes depending on the type of



habitat they live in. This surprising finding indicates that evolutionary divergence can occur at incredibly small spatial scales in response to local variation in the environment.

What are your goals for the summer?

My primary goal for the summer is to develop my ability to craft strong news hooks that capture the public's attention.

What are you most excited about?

I am excited to get out of my academic comfort zone and immerse myself in a completely different world. I feel incredibly fortunate to have the opportunity to work at National Geographic, a publication I have long admired. I am also looking forward to spending my free-time exploring the nation's capital.

Why are you passionate about science communication?

I love science and –like many scientists– would be happy left unto myself at the top of my ivory tower. But science cannot be conducted this way. Our society faces major challenges, and scientific knowledge will be critical for making informed decisions about where we go in the future. For this reason, I am passionate about communicating science to a wider audience.

Who is your favorite science communicator?

Sir David Attenborough, hands down. He pioneered the art of making nature documentaries and shared his infectious love of wildlife with the world, inspiring generations to care about conserving biodiversity.

Do you have a link to an article you'd like to share?

<http://ocwa.blogspot.com>

Describe your dream job.

My dream job would involve some combination of doing science, teaching science, and communicating science.

Tell us about something you do outside of the lab.

I love traveling and exploring new places. A few years ago, I hiked the Inca Trail in Peru, which was an incredible experience. I love ancient cultures, mountains, and wildlife, an Peru had it all in spades!

Anything else you'd like to share?

My home for the past few years – Fort Collins, Colorado – is known for its incredible diversity of tasty local microbrews. I have become an avid fan and particularly enjoy drinking the wood-aged sour browns. If anyone knows of good east-coast sour beers, please let me know!

In junior high school, I told a guidance counselor that I wanted to be a journalist when I grew up. He then proceeded to advise me not to take any science classes in high school. Given my plans for the summer, I think it's fair to say that that was terrible advice.

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